

In my time at the PLA (from 1948 onwards) the customs seals were made, as I remember it, of metal thin enough to be malleable, shaped roughly like the figure 8 except in the middle. One half of the seal had a lip all round. The labels were printed on to stout canvas. A stout needle would be threaded with strong twine and then forced through the fabric of the rug or carpet not far from a convenient corner. The loose ends were then tied in a knot and put onto one half of the seal. This would then be folded and the whole squashed together by a tool not unlike a pair of pliers. This would cause the lip to be squashed into the other half of the "8" and made the removal of the label impossible without destroying the seal.

The tickets came as a roll of stout cards, perforated and pre-printed, and with a hole punched them (I don't remember if they had an eyelet round the hole). This, too, would be affixed to the piece using the same stout twine and the same needle. The knot securing this in place was never sealed.

For most goods, the insertion of the needle caused little if any damage to the rug. On fine pieces the effect was certainly noticeable and on really fine items there is no question but that rugs were damaged. After all, how can a steel needle which was probably around 5 mm wide near the tip possibly get between the warps and wefts without there being a bad effect on these ?

When the goods were sent to the washers (Shahinian, Abadjian and possibly others) the washers' staff would staple the customs label to the rug or carpet, but remove and store the card labels. These would be put back on the piece after it was dry and ready to return to the appropriate consignors. These staples would have been of iron or steel, which is why they frequently left rust marks on the Customs label and, not so frequently, on the fabric of the rug or carpet.

I'm pretty sure that items imported before the war (and there were quite a few of these around in the late 1940s and early 1950s) were sealed on the same manner.

The Persian (later "Iranian") customs used to seal the goods which were presented for export. This was done with a stout wire inserted in the fabric of the rug, usually a long way from a corner, the ends twisted together and enclosed in a small lead seal. This seal showed the Persian (Iranian) symbol of a lion & rising sun.

Jack Haldane 2012 assisted and recorded by Clive Rogers



George V customs seal attached to imported Oriental rugs.
This seal typical of the time in use at the Cutler Street Bonded warehouse. Probably unlike lead seals used in private merchants elsewhere eg OCM



Persian / Iranian customs seal as described above



[1] The presence of a Customs seal proves that the carpet was once in a Bonded Warehouse. It is **NOT** a P.L.A. ticket, as these are in the following format :

WL*-1234-12

9.7 6.3

[2] So far as I know, there were only ever 4 Bonded Warehouses where carpets were stored : Benlian, Eastern Carpets, and O.C.M. (each for their own

goods,) and the P.L.A. (for every one else's).

[3] The only reason I can think of for the staples to have rusted is that the sealed hanging label was stapled on prior to the carpet being washed.

[4] The ticket does not look professional enough to have been an O.C.M. ticket so I can imagine that the piece was imported either by Benlian or by Eastern Carpets.

[5] King George V died in January 1936. Customs seals showing "Geo V" may well have been used for some time after his death.

[6] Following the abdication of King Edward VIII, King George VI acceded to the throne in December 1938. Customs seals showing "Geo VI" will not have existed before that date.

[7] A correct reading of the seal determines the period when the piece was physically *imported* but it is no guide as to *how old* it was on importation.

[8] As for the figures on the ticket, I think that these indicate that carpet arrived in the 294th shipment from the particular importer's agent in Persian, and that it was the 5th piece in the 32nd bale in that shipment. I would imagine 10763 to be the stock number in the importer's own stock records.