

Rooted in Symbolism: An Iconographic and Regional Analysis of the Tree of Life Motif in Kashan, Tabriz, and Herat Carpets.

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ABSTRACT

The Tree of Life is used in Persian art as a symbol to depict the concepts of continuity, spiritual development and relationship of natural world and the divine world. This study will discuss the design of the Tree of Life as used in Carpets of Kashan, Tabriz and Herat, which are three major centres of the Persian carpet weaving. The iconography and regional variation of these carpets and the study will be done. It will also discuss cultural, religious as well as historical reasons that have shaped its representations. The current studies the impact of regional identity on the visual language of the motif, using a systematic study of compositional structure, methods and strengths inherently connected to the style, chromatic pattern and technical qualities. Kashan carpets are often designed in a organized and vertical theme, and this design focuses on highlighting spirituality and design harmony. In contrast, Tabriz carpets were marked by a high degree of naturalism, abundant detailing and a more wide artistic view, which was the evidence of numerous cultural contacts in the region. In addition, Herat examples show combination of geometrical control with flowing vegetable models, and hence depict the historical contribution of the region to art in terms of ethnic exchange. These differences have been emphasized by the study the varied symbolic interpretations of the Tree of Life and in the larger framework of the Persian cultural values in as far as creation, growth, protection, and cosmic harmony are concerned. The findings help to understand better the iconography of Persian carpets and underline the role of the craft in the region in developing the visual and symbolic language of traditional textile work.

Keywords: Carpet; Motifs; Persia; Tree of Life; Symbolism.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Overview of Persian Carpets

In Persian art, the Tree of Life remains a timeless motif symbolizing different aspects of life and it is widespread throughout the world by Art, Religion and Material Culture; the Tree of Life motif can be found on the most elegant designs of Persian carpets. Persian carpets have been created as very high quality handmade textiles throughout history and therefore it has extensive historical and cultural significance in the textile industry. For centuries this type of textile has played an integral role in the Cultural and Social life of Iran. Persian carpets made in areas such as Kashan, Tabriz and Herat are not just a decorative object, but they serve several other functions, such as; carrying a message or meaning, telling a story and conveying the Values and belief systems of those who created the carpets. Persian carpets have many themes including Religion, Political History and Regional Identity, thus providing a window into Iranian culture and its values and beliefs as manifested through Art (Shahbazi, 2015). By being a part of the Historical, Social and Aesthetic values of its time, Persian Carpet continues

to be relevant today and will continue to thrive into the future.

In the field of carpet weaving, the repetitive design element(s), or motif(s), of the carpet exhibit many layers of meaning and are both decorative and representative of cultural and religious beliefs, cosmological beliefs and individual regional identities (Pope 2000). Persian carpets produced in Kashan, Tabriz and Herat provide an excellent opportunity to investigate the transformation(s) of this motif over time due to the various factors that each region has contributed to develop their own stylistic features, based upon their local cultural richness, and/or through the many historical and artistic styles they developed (Eiland and Eiland 1998)

Many people relate the Tree of Life in Persian Carpets to the idea of resurrection, the idea of being on a spiritual journey to a higher place, and the connection between this physical world and that of the higher spiritual realm. These symbolic ideas come from the concepts of an ancient Persian cosmology, which explains that the concept of the sacred tree as being the connection between the material world and the spiritual world (Canby 2017). However, regardless of the overall symbolism of the Tree

of Life, the way in which they are created vary widely by region. Kashan carpets have more precise patterns exhibiting great attention to detail and also incorporating the more decorative type of art (court style); Tabriz carpets typically have more reliable structure and strong storytelling designs; while the weavings from Herat incorporate more flowing and decorative ornamentation and were influenced heavily by the Timurid artistic movement (Dims 2011; Thompson 2019).

The study shows how Tree of Life as both an artwork and symbol is influenced by cultural, religious, and social identity in different regions. The result of this analysis shows that Tree of Life is flexible and varied in terms of its artwork and symbol depending on the culture from which it grows, creating a picture of the wealth of art and culture within Persian textile tradition.

Research Focus

The Tree of Life is one of the oldest and also one of the most significant motifs used in the designs of Persian carpets. This motif has roots in multicultural traditions, and symbolizes life, growth, and the relationship between Heaven (divine) and Earth (local). Therefore, in Persian carpets, the Tree of Life is commonly shown as a "stylized tree" with branches extending upward; this is a representation of the connection of Heaven to Earth. Many carpets from the three cities of Kashan, Tabriz and Herat (the three major carpet weaving cities in Persia) depict trees of life which illustrate their distinctive cultural, artistic and symbolic heritages (Atabaki, 2011).

Kashan, Tabriz and Herat have long been some of the best carpet manufacturing areas in Persia, and their carpets are well known for exceptional technical precision along with rich symbolic meaning. The Tree of Life motif sewn into these carpets is a good example of the aesthetics, spiritual, and social values which influenced the Iranian culture (Ravasi, 2018).

Purpose and Objectives

Research, using iconography and area studies, the Tree of Life theme in the carpets produced in Kashan, Tabriz and Herat. Through the carpet examinations, this study will demonstrate how the Tree of Life theme acts as a representation of life, development and relationship with a higher power within Persian artistic tradition. There are two main objectives of this study: The first objective is to compare and contrast the Tree of Life theme in carpets produced in different areas of Persia. The second objective is to study the development and evolution of the various cultural, religious and symbolic aspects that have shaped the Tree of Life theme in carpets from these regions.

The Research objectives are:

To gain a better understanding of the use of the Tree of Life theme within the different carpet design styles from these regions (Kashan, Tabriz and Herat).

To understand how the geographical location, religious beliefs and social context have influenced the artistic representation of the Tree of Life theme within each of these regions.

To understand the various symbolic meanings assigned to the Tree of Life within these three regions and how they

relate to the overall culture of Persia (Ravasi, 2018; Atabaki, 2011).

Literature Review

Symbolism of the Tree of Life

Across cultures, religious traditions, and philosophies, the Tree of Life motif is one of the most widely-known symbols. Across all cultures, the meaning of this motif remains the same, as it represents the three aspects of the Tree of Life: fertility, life, and the connection to both Earth and Heaven through the branches and leaves of the tree. The visual representations of the Tree of Life as it has been interpreted through the different areas of the world reflect these differences in design, in most instances, and with some exceptions, they reflect similar patterns of interconnectedness and renewal. Examples of the Tree of Life appear in many cultures through ancient mythologies, biblical writings, and the artwork of different civilizations including those of Mesopotamia; Egypt; the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths (Eliade, 1958). The Tree of Life is often associated with eternal life within the Christian tradition (George, 2003).

The symbolism of the Tree of Life is strong in the culture of Persia, and it serves as a bridge between the Earth and Heaven. In many instances, the roots of the Tree represent the Earthly aspects of human existence, while the branches reaching toward Heaven represent the Divine aspects. The Tree of Life motif embodies Persian Philosophy regarding how the two worlds (material and spiritual) are interconnected (Lentz, 2012). The Tree of Life motif is incorporated into the design of carpets from Persia as an ornamental design, but also for its deep spiritual significance as creation and growth, and an image for continual elevation (Shahbazi, 2015). As more study has been done in how the Tree of Life motif is employed in Persian Art, particularly in Persian carpets, scholars have provided insights into the use of the motif for both narrative expression and representation of a Cosmic Order (Ravasi, 2018).

Previous Studies on Symbolism in Persian Carpets

Several authors dedicate study on the symbolic elements of Persian carpets, which include one of the most significant motifs; "Tree of Life". This motif serves as a metaphor for the idea of the continuum of life and the cyclical nature of our existence and is represented on carpets throughout various regions such as Kashan, Tabriz, and Herat, each uniquely varying in style, technique and symbolism (Atabaki, 2011). The Tree of Life motif itself is fairly consistent across different regions; however, the meanings attributed to the Tree of Life are significantly influenced by local cultural practices, historical context and religious beliefs (Lentz, 2012).

In addition to studying how artists create meaning using symbolism on Persian Carpets, scholars also have looked at how the Tree of Life motif interacts with other symbols or designs (e.g., flowers, birds, geometric patterns) to create a unified, complex message (Ravasi, 2018). Shahbazi (2015) studied how the location of the Tree of Life can depend on which region it is found in; some regions focus on simply the decorative features of the

motif while other regions focus on the symbolism and narrative aspects of the motif.

Regional Characteristics of Kashan, Tabriz, and Herat Carpets

Every area in Persia produces carpets woven in different styles. For example, Kashan and Tabriz Herat represent high-quality examples based upon their own unique designs and craftsmanship techniques. In addition to their historical development dating back (1) to the 16th century, Kashan carpets are characterized by elaborate, sophisticated patterns along with vivid color combinations, using floral/Tree of Life (Tree of Life) designs (2) (Shahbazi 2015) (3) in their compositions. Also known for its large production of carpets since the Safavid era, Kashan carpets are considered as among the best examples of Persian artwork (Atabaki 2011). Most Kashan carpets will have a central medallion surrounded by ornamental floral designs and elaborate borders. The Tree of Life usually signifies a connection to the "afterlife" or the spiritual union of all living things (Lentz 2012). Additionally, the Tree of Life is depicted within Kashan carpets in a flourishing abundance of flowers, branches, and vegetation, creating a garden-like setting that symbolizes good fortune, renewal, and the healthy growth of Life. Since there is an ongoing tradition of producing highly decorative or ornamental carpets, poetic beauty continues to remain a hallmark of the Kashan region's artistic heritage.

Tabriz carpets are known for their sophisticated craftsmanship and bold geometric patterns, while Tabriz has been a central hub for the production of carpets for hundreds of years, resulting in a layout that is often more structured than that of Kashan (Eliade, 1958). The Tree of Life design on Tabriz carpets is usually encased in a series of geometric patterns and is frequently thought of as representing the connection between the design and divinity (Ravasi, 2018). Tabriz carpets exhibit many characteristics of Islamic Art; geometric patterns and symbolisms are a major aspect of the overall design of these carpets. In addition, the cosmopolitan production methods employed in Tabriz have resulted in these carpets incorporating more influence from other cultures and having a wealth of narrative elements added to their designs.

The Herat carpet was largely influenced by the Timurid dynasty in the area, which produced carpets that display both Persian and Central Asian influences throughout their history. The designs of the Herat carpets are asymmetrical in nature, and they incorporate an array of vibrant colours that contrast when placed side by side. The Tree of Life motif is usually illustrated in an abstracted manner, often seen surrounded by many floral designs and symbols that signify the spiritual and cultural connection of the area (George, 2003; Shahbazi, 2015). The motifs used in Herat carpets do not have set shapes or styles like those of other regions but rather have flowing forms that reflect their dynamic nature, both in terms of life and the cosmos. The spirituality of the motifs has a contemplative quality because of the strong cultural ties of the region to the concepts of Islamic mysticism and poetry.

Iconographic Analysis in Art History

Iconography refers to the study of visual symbols and motifs used primarily in the study of art history. Iconographic analysis is used to uncover deeper meanings of motifs within Persian carpets and the relationship between those motifs and their symbolic significance (Eliade, 1958). An analysis of the Tree of Life motif through an Iconographic analysis has provided insights into the cultural, religious and philosophical views of the societies that created the carpets (Lentz, 2012). The meaning of the Tree of Life motif as it is used in the context of the overall carpet design can also be understood within the context of other motifs in the carpet and how the motifs are used (e.g. flowers, animals and/or Geometric Patterns). Atabaki (2011) argues that the Tree of Life motif is more than just a decorative element; it is a representation of the worldview and spiritual beliefs of the weaver and therefore, how the motif is placed and treated within the overall design of the carpet will help us to interpret its symbolic meaning. The Tree of Life motifs in Persian carpets represent a continuum of the belief systems of the various regions from which the carpets were created (Ravasi, 2018). For example, a Tree of Life motif in a carpet created in one region may be depicted in a more naturalistic way, while another region may represent the motif in a more abstracted manner.

The analysis of iconography enables study to view the language of visual representations of Persian carpets to understand the cultural and religious messages incorporated in the design. It is crucial to approach this method to learn about the symbolic meaning of the Tree of Life motif and its application in the practice of Persian carpet weaving.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses comparative qualitative analysis of carpets featuring the Tree of Life motif produced in three key Persian carpet weaving regions: Kashan, Tabriz, and Herat. The research design intends to compare photographs of selected carpet samples from each region and identify variations related to both the visual design and symbolic meaning, as related to the tree of life motif, in these carpets. The comparative methodology used in this study provides for an understanding of how differences among the three regions, such as culture, historical context, and religious preferences, have influenced how this specific design element is represented in the carpets (Lentz, 2012).

Through the study of carpets produced in three different areas, study aim to identify both the commonalities present in these carpets as well as the diversity that exists with respect to the use of the tree of life motif in Persian art. The selection of selected carpets will be based upon the historical significance, quality, and representation of the tree of life motifs and will yield a complete analysis of this specific design element and will represent those regions appropriately (Shahbazi, 2015).

Data Collection

For this research, the primary method of data gathering will be visual analysis of current written collections of carpets that have been sourced through Museum Collections, Private Collections and Historical Records. The study will look at an array of different types of carpets that represent a variety of ages, but particularly encompass those created during the Safavid and Timurid period as they NA= Given their rich artistic heritage. As noted by Ravasi, (2018).

Museum Collections examples of key institutions which have major collections of Persian carpets, such as the Museum of Islamic Art in Tehran and the British Museum in London will be an important data source for visual analysis of carpets.

Collectors/Private Galleries specializing in Persian Art may provide additional carpets for the analysis which would be important as they could also provide examples of carpets with lesser known designs variations within regions.

Historical Records of Persian Carpets will be researched and accessed to provide additional context behind the origin of the Tree of Life motif and the changes in significance of that motif over the years (Atabaki, 2011).

The stylistic aspects of the motif, which may be considered in visual analysis, include the way in which the branches and roots have been displayed, the use of colour and the decorative objects that are surrounding it (flowers, animals and geometrical patterns). This method will allow determining the diversity of the design and facilitate explaining the cultural and symbolic connotations of the motif in various regions (Shahbazi, 2015).

Approach

Iconographic Method

The Tree of Life design motif will be analysed using an iconographic approach, which is focused on examining detailed information regarding the motifs and their relative position within the database. The iconographers will look at how the Tree of Life motif is interpreted by the scholars, based upon the iconography, and what they interpret to be the themes related to the interpretation of that motif, such as (1) life, (2) development and (3) the connection to the divinity (Lentz 2012)

The iconography will also provide an insight into the interpretation of the Tree of Life represented in various ways, for example as a symbol of God's authority, a symbol of the continuity of all things or a symbol of the relationship between heaven and earth. The study will examine how the Tree of Life motif interacts with other motifs in the carpets such as animals, flowers and geometric shapes and how this adds to the meaning of the motif (Ravasi 2018).

Regional Approach

Comparative analysis of the Tree of Life motif used on carpets from Kashan (Iran) and Tabriz (Iran) and carpet makers located in the area of Herat (Afghanistan) will use a regional approach to identify the regional aspects that have impacted how and in what way the Tree of Life motif is represented in these regions. An examination of

the carpets that come from each region will give researchers a greater understanding of the cultural, religious, and historical context that has influenced the way the Tree of Life design is represented on carpets from each of these areas. For example, carpets produced in Kashan are distinguished by their highly detailed floral designs, whereas carpets produced in Tabriz often feature geometric patterns (Shahbazi, 2015). The interpretation of the Tree of Life motif may be different in Herat as it relates to their fluid and asymmetrical carpets (George, 2003).

By comparing how the Tree of Life motif is depicted in various ways, the study hope to highlight the ways the art of a region reflects the region's identity and that, although the meaning of the Tree of Life motif may be constant from region to region, the meaning of the Tree of Life motif varies with each region's culture, beliefs, and aesthetic preferences (Ravasi, 2018). Such a comparative analysis will allow for a better appreciation of the importance of regional influences on the design of Persian carpets and of the significance of the Tree of Life motif to the region.

Rationale for Graphical Analysis in Research for the Justification for Quantitative Visual Analysis

An analysis of the data shown below, via bar graph representation, highlights systematically and comparably how distinct visual characteristics of the Tree of Life motifs, as represented on generalised carpets from various parts of Persia, differ across branches, root size, colour palette and production date for the carpets sampled. Use of quantitative methods allows researchers to better understand stylistic tendencies of Persian artwork through means other than descriptive accounts. The graphical data has allowed for enhanced comparison between regions for the purpose of understanding how geography, locally available materials and socioeconomic issues affect the evolution of Carpet motifs. Additionally, the graphical presentation of the data allows for the development of generalised cross-regional observations to assist in understanding and interpreting the symbolic meanings and cultural identities found in visual cultural representations of Iran and Persia.

Branch Complexity

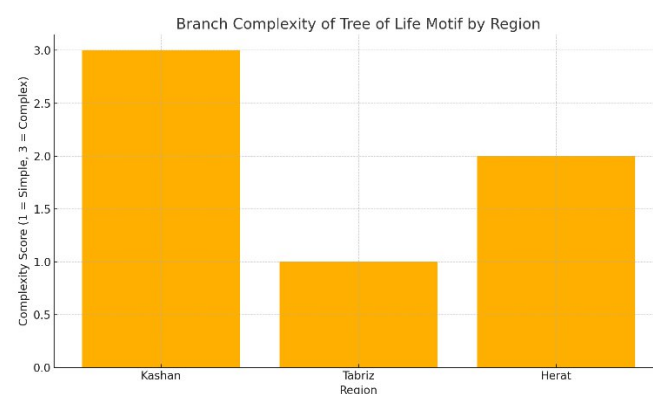


Figure 1: Branch complexity of the Tree of life motif by region

The information confirms the findings made in earlier qualitative studies on how the local aesthetic tradition and technical mastery affect the variation of motifs in Persian art. The increased sophistication of Kashan is probably a consequence of its traditional associations with courtly and garden imagery, which allowed more elaborate visual descriptions. The plainness of Tabriz could believe either an artistic tradition of choice or of local weaving, which supports abstraction. The median score of Herat can be viewed either as the representation of cross-regional features, or as the elements of transitionalism in the stylistic feature of the Herat culture.

Root Prominence

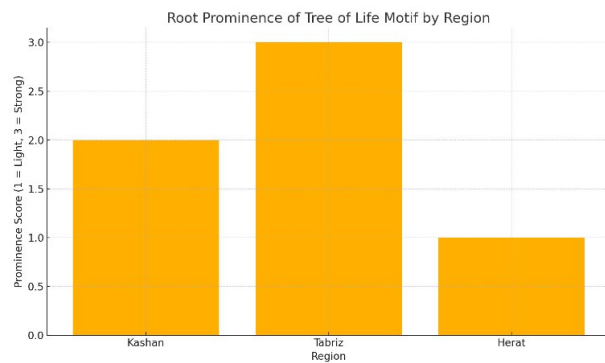


Figure 2 Root prominence of the Tree of Life motif by region

The graph indicates a different regional emphasis of the symbolic focus of the Persian Tree of Life motives, with Tabriz having strong roots that could extend their emphasis on lineages of strength in their artwork, Kashan moderate judgement of roots that there is an equilibrium between what is on the ground and above ground and Herat minimum judgement of roots indicated their preference to other facets of the motif, which social cultural factors could be a clear influence on visual arts in Persia.

Palette Richness

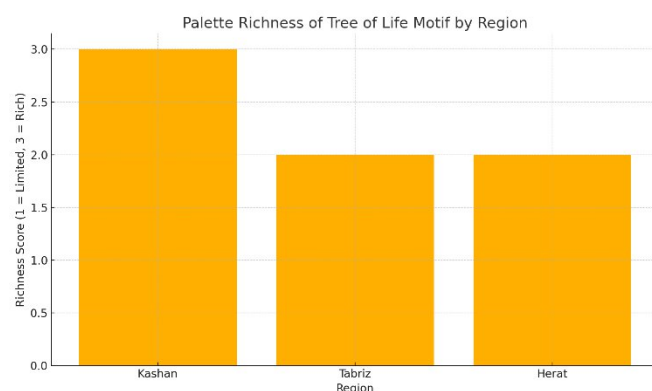


Figure 3: Palette Richness of Tree of Life motif by region

From the graphs, it can be seen that Kashan has the widest range of colour use in its motifs for the Tree of Life and has received the highest score for that reason. This indicates the long-standing tradition of using many different vibrant colours in Kashan as a result of the region's relationship with art production. Conversely, both Tabriz and Herat have limited colour use in their motifs for the Tree of Life and received equal average scores of 3; indicating there were probably limitations on the resources (materials) they had access to or the local cultural preference for more subtle colours. Historically these data show us how access to resources, proximity to each other, and local tastes have developed the differing colour traditions within Persian visual arts, thus demonstrating the influence of both geographic and socio-economic conditions in developing how art is expressed in Iranian culture.

Century of Production

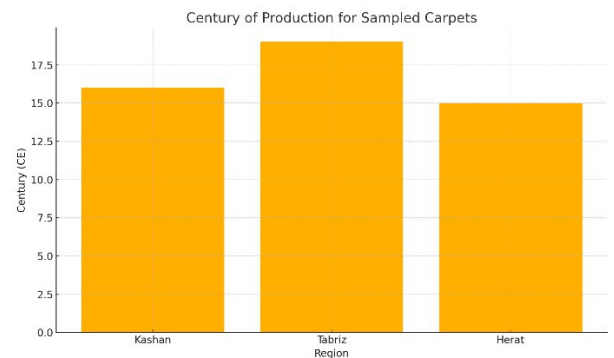


Figure 4 Century of Production for sampled Carpets

The bar chart depicts the centuries of the production of carpets in Kashan, Tabriz and Herat and shows that there are significant temporal differences of these regions. Tabriz has the latest period of production, circa the nineteenth century CE, which implies either a more modern appearance or continuity in the carpet-making history, possibly due to local socio-political comfort or to a fresh cultural endorsement. Kashan and Herat, in contrast, exhibit previous periods of greater production, around the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries respectively, which could be indicators of prior innovation or change in the patterns of trade and patronage. This time variability reveals information about the differences in the historical pathway and processes of preservation of local weaving of carpets.

Comparative Table: Comparison of Tree of Life Motif in Kashan, Tabriz, and Herat Carpets

S. No.	Attribute	Kashan Carpet	Tabriz Carpet	Herat Carpet
1	Motif style	Intricate, floral	Geometric symmetrical	Flowing and organic
2	Branch Design	Curved and delicate	Stiff, angular	Flowing, natural

3	Root Design	Subtle, intertwined	Strong, prominent	Light, dispersed
4	Color Palette	Rich reds, blues, golds	Deep blues, ivory, muted tones	Earthy tones, greens, browns
5	Symbolism	Life cycle, divine connection and natural beauty	Representation of divine order and luxury of courtly life	Symbol of spiritual journey: Growth, renewal, fertility
6	Associated Motifs	Flowers, birds, paired animals; dense vegetation	Animals (gazelles, birds), garden scenes, courtly iconography	Pomegranates, vases, stars; minimal surrounding elements
7	Period	Safavid (16 th century)	Qajar (19 th Century)	Timurid (15 th century)
8	Cultural Influences	Safavid garden aesthetics and royal patronage	Intellectual and artistic traditions of the Tabriz courts; workshop precision	Timurid-Herat artistic heritage; manuscript illumination style
9	Tree Form	Multiple delicate trees; finely articulated branches	Single large, balanced tree often framed within a medallion or arch	Centralized vertical tree with simplified branching patterns
10	Artistic Techniques	Fine knotting; detailed botanical rendering	Technical sophistication; balanced proportions	Geometric stylization; emphasis on symbolism rather than realism

Explanation of Data

Kashan, Tabriz, and Herat each represent a Persian carpet region and each has its own unique artistic tradition which affects the carpet's design.

Motif Style

In Kashan, the motifs are intricate and highly detailed floral motifs that express the high level of sophistication that existed in the Safavid period.

In Tabriz the motifs are characterized by geometric shapes and symmetrical patterns, showing that the region focused on creating structural balance through intellectual methodology.

In Herat, the motifs are fluid and organic, which reflects Herat's interest in rhythmic forms inspired by illuminated Timurid manuscripts.

Branch Design

Kashan: Branches become curved, soft, and dainty, which is corroborating the naturalistic inclinations of the garden designs of the region.

Tabriz: Branches are painted in angular and rather strict in outlines serving to create order and harmony of the general composition.

Herat: The arms are flowing and natural implying growth, movement, and spiritual ascending.

Root Design

Kashan: Roots are also fine and tangled which has a symbolism of interconnections in the physical world.

Parallel Tabriz: In Tabriz, the predominant and salient roots demonstrate frames of strength and stability, which conform to the structural definition bloc in the face of the Tabriz.

Herat: Herat has roots that are loosely spread, reflecting the impermanent and transcendent nature of spiritual motifs in Herat.

Color Palette

Kashan: It is dominated by rich reds, blues and golds, denoting affluence and the decadence of the culture of the Safavid court.

Tabriz: Saturated blues, ivory, and muted sounds are used, placing emphasis on sophistication and restraint, like courtly arts.

Herat: Bread and weeks and Browns give thoughts of nature, and of inward majesty.

Symbolism

Kashan: This represents the life cycle, divine relationship and the beauty of nature.

Tabriz: A symbol of the cosmic order, divine power and cultured nature of the courtly life.

Herat: Expresses the themes of spiritual quest, rejuvenation, fertility and self renewal.

Associated Motifs

Kashan: Dense plant, flower decoration, birds and animal twinning depict the garden-paradise symbolism of Safavid visual culture.

Tabriz: It uses gazelles, birds and garden scenes, which depict royal symbolism and narrative courtly elements.

Herat: Pomegranates, vases, and star patterns are included, but they are frequently sparsely dressed, thus placed to create symbolic richness, not visual opulence.

Period

Kashan: Kashan is attributed to the Safavid era (16 th century) which had a flourishing artistic and textile tradition.

Tabriz: Dates back to the Qajar period (19 th century) characterized by revivalism and sophisticated production in workshops.

Herat: Reminisces of Timurid period (1500s) and its overture to fine manuscript and textile styles.

Cultural Influences

Kashan: Safavid garden, religious and royal influence.

Tabriz: Based on the intellectual and artistic culture of Tabriz courts, in which precision and technical excellence were valued.

Herat: weighed down by the Timurid artistic heritage, in particular, by the imagery of illuminated manuscripts.

Tree Form

Kashan: It has various fragile trees whose branches are richly defined to form a luxurious display.

Tabriz: Typically depicts one tree, symmetrical, and in balance within a medallion or arch building.

Herat: Is painted with one vertical and simplified tree with greater emphasis on clarity and symbolism.

Artistic Techniques

Kashan: Fine knotters, and with botanical delicacy, highly technical.

Tabriz: Characterized by the elegance of technique and proportion due to the rigorous application of the workshop technique.

Herat: The style focuses on symbolic, expressive, geometric stylization and realism.

Analysis and Discussion

Kashan Carpets

Historical context

The workshops of Kashan were very successful throughout the early parts of the Safavid period (15th to 17th centuries), thanks to the presence of fine quality Kermān wool (kork) as well as the demand from the royal courts for elaborate, richly detailed carpets (Pope 1939; Bennett 2014). The expertise of the weavers in this city was well-documented and known to produce many types of carpets; they also had an advanced vocabulary for both silk and wool and created some of the most interesting designs in early Safavid Art (Thompson 2010). Many of these designs were commissioned by the royal court, or for export, and were designed to reflect both cosmopolitan and local elements (Floor 1999). The cultural ideals of the Safavids strongly influenced the iconographical content of Kashan carpets, particularly the ideas of paradise and the garden, and included the Tree of Life. This motif was featured repeatedly throughout the tapestry of this artistic approach (Denny,2014).

Visual characteristics of the Tree of Life

Kashan trees are typically very bushy and have thin, twisting branches that end in either palmette or lotus blossoms (Chart 1). In Kashan, the trunk typically grows from a stylized vase representing the overflow of paradise and spreads into two equal halves across the design (Lentz 2012). A simple collection of interlaced scrolls forms the root area and ends with arabesques that symbolically link earth's soil to heaven's flowers (Eliade, 1958). The overall visual design is reminiscent of the design elements in Persian manuscript illustrations where the accuracy and elegance of the plant forms would take precedence (Faroghi, 2017). The Kashan 'tree' is characterized by a color palette predominantly consisting of deep reds, soft blues, and gold accents that help create the rich ornamental detail and atmospheric qualities associated with Kashan textiles.

Symbolism and regional influences

The elaborate and lightly branching design of this carpet opens a discussion of Shi'i mystical imagery, especially the representation of the heavenly at Tūbā; however, the compelling colours of red, blue, and gold as presented were produced using locally produced dyes of cochineal, indigo(blue), and gold and served as markers of status along the Kāshān-Isfahān trade routes (Ravasi 2018). The floral spandrels surrounding the medallion also serve to emphasise the garden-paradise theme that dominated

Safavid-era (Shahbazi 2015). Representationally, it represents growth, vitality, and renewal; it represents the cyclical nature of existence, consistent with overarching themes found previously in Persian cosmological thought. On a spiritual level, this motif also conveys connotations of spirituality in the context of cosmological perspectives, as a literal representation of a spiritual connection between the material world and the idealised paradise from the Islamic vision (Blair & Bloom 2003). Kashan carpets typically exhibit stylistic similarities with contemporary miniature painting and architectural ornamentation practices, which demonstrate how these forms of regional artistic style contributed to the creation of a shared visual language for the Tree of Life motif (Canby 2015). These experiences and artwork come together to create carpets that exist beyond the parameters of utility, and embody the combined cultural and symbolic significance of the carpets as part of Persian artistic heritage.

Tabriz Carpets

Artistic heritage

Historically, Tabriz illustrates one of the most important threads in the tapestry of Persian textiles through its long history of court support for artisanship and scholarship. It became important again in the 19th Century during the Qajar revival, a period when merchant houses, such as the Ziegler company, began to commission large-scale workshop productions geared toward the European marketplace (Eiland 2016). Although influenced by Timurid design, these 19th-century examples utilized a more exacting and geometric format than earlier designs to appeal to contemporary aesthetics (George 2003). As one of the most significant cultural centres in northwestern Iran, Tabriz had a significant role in the advancement of the arts during both the Ilkhanid court and the subsequent Safavid court, producing workshop products with very high levels of technical precision, intricate designs, and developed pictorial systems (Miller, 2018). This artistic legacy has created an advanced visual language that has significantly influenced carpet creation and production in the surrounding region of Tabriz and established Tabriz as the central point for producing and communicating symbolic representations, such as the Tree of Life.

Variations of the Tree of Life.

Tree of Life in Tabriz rugs is developed into angular tiered branches atop a large fluted tree trunk with roots clearly accented and surrounding the central portion of the tree (Chart 1) while framed by octagon shaped cartouches or mihrabs on multiple sides (Chart 2). The roots are pronounced on the bottom of the tree, supporting the concept of cosmological axis (Axis Mundi) that runs through the centre of the universe (Atabaki 2011). Tabriz rug trees have a colour harmony favouring white/beige and deep blue combinations, which produce an impression of calm architecture (Sabahi 2017). Tabriz tree types usually are separated into one centrally placed tree with an arch or medallion frame around it, which serves to show the concept of divine unity or coherence (Yazdi, 2020). The way the leaves branch off is highly organized, giving a structure that represents stability and elegance,

two principles of Royal Courts for the Tabriz region, creating an aesthetic quality connected to the region's tradition of manuscript illumination and miniature painting.

Cultural and religious drivers

The geometricisation indicates the long history of the city manuscript-illumination as well as a Qajar love of orderliness in ornamentation that recalls the tilework in mosques (Rogers 2009). Shiite pious poetry, which was frequently reproduced in Tabriz, often indirectly compared the ahl-al-bayt lineage to a well-established path of guidance, whose visual symbolism the carpets reflect (Bennett 2014). The cosmological theories were adopted by Tabriz, which were traditionally oriented at an Islamic-inspired religious philosophy, and in which the poetic concept of the tree represents the connection between the earthly realm and the divine one (Soudavar, 2016). Metaphysical interpretation of the carpets is supported by symbolic elements like paired animals, garden, and vegetal profuse, which is turned into metaphoric image of paradise. The combination of artistic craftsmanship, theological allegory, and royal patronage, therefore, makes Tabriz carpets unique objects that combine both aestheticism and spiritual quality.

Herat Carpets

Distinct weaving tradition

The Timurid capital herat (modern-day Afghanistan) had a court atelier during the 15 th century with a blend of Persian, Central Asian and Chinese motifs (Jones 2010). Subsidiary production in later in favor of the regional khanates maintained this eclectic tradition, but on smaller, workshop looms. The studios of Herat were profoundly subjected to exquisite aesthetic ideals, connected with the illumination of the manuscripts, book arts, and court atelier, which introduced carpets, displaying harmonious compositions, restrained decoration, and accentuating linear elegance (Golombek, 2011). In comparison to the higher mass floral designs of the subsequent Persian weaving centres, Herat designs are more inclined to order emphasis and fluidity, which points to an extension of the Timurid artistic canon.

Tree of Life specifics

This stylistic orientation is reflected in Herat carpets with the Tree of Life motif that are treated in a specific way. The tree is normally a vertically derived and gently bifurcated shape that is often simplistic but contains symbolism connoted by that form. The appearance is usually one with long trunks, scattered leaves, and limited botanical values which remind of the concept of spiritual elevation and metaphysical perfect arrangement (Blair and Bloom, 2009). In herati versions, the figure of the tree is flowing and there are asymmetric off-shoots (Chart 1) and light and dispersed roots (Chart 2). Branches blot as cloud-band terminals or shabby fig leaves, heresying a Timurid-Ming syncretism (Bier 1986). They are dominated by earthy greens and browns (Chart 3), reflecting the vegetal dye base of the area, and the agrarians.

Historical-political inflections

It was the historical and political processes that also influenced the Tree of Life image in Herat. The city is a cosmopolitan hub in the Silk Road, which helped it to exchange artistic ideas with Central Asia, India, and the general Islamic world. Such contacts developed a visual hybridity, where geometric discipline is combined with lyrical, manuscript-inspired ornamentation (Carboni, 2014). Mongol/Timurid patronage periods have created themes which combine Islamic imagery of the paradise with shamanic sets of symbols of the steppe; subsequent Safavid domination created Persianate border regimes without replacing the spirited tree (Eaton 2005). The informal composition could also be nomadic production at the time when maximum symmetry is not a value (Shahbazi 2015). In general, carpets of Herat also feature a unique version of the Tree of Life that developed due to both the local weaving tradition and the intellectual tendencies and the political structures of that Timurid period. The visual language that they have been practicing shows that there has been an aesthetic restraint, a symbolic abstraction and an integration of their cultures and so Herat emerges as a major center of development of Persian iconography.

Regional identity and representation

The richness of Kashan predicts the luxuriance of the spirit in line with a courtly hermiu. The theme in Kashan is expressed via the sophisticated use of floral decoration and harmonic arrangements which are qualities attributed to the Safavid court patronage, and the tradition of luxurious silk and wool manufacturing that have always characterized the area (Canby, 2019). The carpus designs and fine ramification not only imprint an ideal of cultivated garden but even encode the symbolism of the sky of the paradise, which fits his greater artistic self of sophistication and naturalism of botanical style (Kadoi, 2021).

The geometrical discipline of Tabriz reflects its academic and trade self-perception; being a historical center of manuscript and artistic industry, as well as trade relationships, Tabriz created its own visual language, one of symmetry, controlled geometry, and narrative readability (Carboni, 2016). These traits are converted into Tree of Life compositions focused on structural order and high levels of crafts-manship, with a sense of regional identity of courtly savvy and cross-cultural dialogue (Blair, 2020).

The organic looseness of Herat is the expression of a frontier cosmopolitanism which is a mixture of Persian and Central-Asian words (Floor 1999; Ravasi 2018). The aesthetic character of the region is associated with the illumination-in-manuscripts, in verse imagery, and a spiritual focus whereby the beauty and characters are symbolic and not realistic (Subtelny, 2007). Accordingly, the Herat carpets of the Tree of Life are more stylized and vertical, which acquires ideas of transcendence and spiritualism ascendancy in the cultural and political history of the region (Roxburgh, 2013). Together these regional differences show how the Tree of Life motif is being used as a visual identity marker to the extent of local artistic practice, socio-political environments, and cultural perspectives of the world in Persia.

Cultural, religious, environmental factors

Cultural: The urban-courtly environment (Kashan, Tabriz) prefers a high degree of codification of iconography, but a borderland culture of Herat encourages syncretism (Eaton 2005). With Kashan, where the culture of the Persian court had been used since ancient times, weaving traditions also developed in an environment characterized by literary cultivation, court funding, and a focus on naturalistic floral imagery. Such cultural processes created a visual regime where motifs, especially the Tree of Life, revealed the concepts of beauty, cosmological balance, and spiritual connection (Karimi, 2019). Cultural pluralism and intellectual endeavor in Tabriz led to a tradition of designed sophistication which was all too high. Being a large hub of the Silk road, the city combined Turkish, Persian, and Caucasian influences in its weaving process (Safarov, 2020). Herat carpets, in their turn, are characterized by a combination of Timurid artistic traditions and manuscript illumination methods, as well as a profoundly spiritual cultural context. A visual style that was courtly workshop-prosperous was characterized by the abstraction of naturalism and symbolic expressions with poetic nuances (Rahimi, 2017).

Religious: Kashan designs were also enriched with religious influences, particularly, Shiite symbolism and Sufi metaphysicalism, introducing the idea of divine ascent and a renewal which is immortal in their dense fugue (Mokhtari, 2021). Religious scholarship and philosophical enquiry in Tabriz produced a symbolic vocabulary that stressed order, symmetry and transcendence to form the systematic decoding of the Tree of Life in local carpets (Qasemi, 2018). Religious currents and the mysticism and contemplation traditions defined the Tree of Life as an allegory of human inward change and spiritual growth (Latifi, 2019).

Environmental: Geographically, fine knotting and dense chromatic palettes were enabled by the geography of an oasis with access to high-quality wool and natural dyes; this was specifically Kashan. Dye sources determine palette, the dry plateau of Kashan is an excellent source of bright madder reds. In Tabriz where the city was closer to trade routes, it was able to get a variety of materials, the city had access to technical accuracy and a fine style. The environment of fertile valleys and Herat, providing the natural dyes and wool, also led to the use of earthy coloring and organic shapes of the region (Sabahi 2017)

3. CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

It is demonstrated in this comparative study that the Tree of Life motif acts as a binding symbol throughout Persian carpets but has been realized in regional dialects. It is seen in Kashan work as a highly floral, centrally located image of paradisiacally richness with a hint of Safavid opulence at court (Pope 1939; Lentz 2012). The tree is geometrically interpreted by Tabriz weavers, an image of the universe arrangement that conforms to the preferences of the Qajar period to symmetry and the consistency of doctrine (Atabaki 2011; Eiland 2016). The privilege of Herat carpets is a running, asymmetric tree with earthly

palette as well as cloud-belt terminals, displaying Timurid-steppe syncretism and agrarian renewal (Bier 1986; Ravasi 2018). Although the styles differ, each of the three centers utilizes the theme to cut the axis of the earth and the divine, therefore, maintaining a common Persian visual theology (Eliade 1958).

Cultural Significance

The adaptable quality of the motif highlights the way in which the Persian society incorporates regional, religious and historical context into the crafted work. The luxury branches in Kashan are reflective of its mercantile prosperity and Shiite mystical inclination; the disciplined form of Tabriz depicts a scholarly-mercantile center prone to absorb the influence of the Mongols, Timurid and Persian (George 2003; Shahbazi 2015). In this way, the Tree of Life is not only a signifier but also a canvas on which regional self-expression is implemented, which confirms that carpets were not only commodities but carriers of cultural memory (Sabahi 2017)

Contributions to Art History

This study illustrates that Persian carpets are the subtle images of the visual narratives through the foregrounding of iconography, providing no reason to rely on technical or economic elements. The local comparison has expanded the art-historical discourse of monolithic Persian design, exposing the localisation of general symbols in workshops. It also combines the studies of carpet to the general iconographic approach, revealing similarities between textile imagery and manuscript imagery in pre-modern Iran (Rogers 2009). These insights promote the view that carpets are texts that move about and express theologically, or courtly ideologies, and the aesthetics of interregional trade (Floor 1999).

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