

A Study into the Mostofi Design Carpets of Arak (Sultanabad) and Farahan

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Introduction

This study is field-based and has limited theoretical aspects and aims. It is the first time it has examined, analyzed, and introduced the origin and the formal, content-based, and technical dimensions of the Mostofi design in Arak and Farahan carpets. The lack of existing resources on this design and the necessity of understanding its roots and characteristics emphasize the importance of this research. The Mostofi design is a comprehensive pattern with floral motifs, structured around paired spiral Eslimi. Based on historical samples, it likely entered Arak and Farahan carpet-weaving schools in the late 19th century and gained popularity. Eighteen distinct designs were selected and studied after excluding similar examples. The primary research question is: what are the technical and aesthetic features of the Mostofi carpet design? This research adopts a developmental, qualitative approach using descriptive-analytical methods, with data collection carried out through fieldwork, library research, and credible online databases. Innovative research into carpet designs and patterns from various regions of Iran such as Arak and Farahan carpet-weaving schools and their affiliated hubs—including notable areas like Sarough, Lilian, and Mahallat—has been scarce. This absence of comprehensive documentation and research highlights the necessity of in-depth studies in traditional arts and handicrafts. From the mid-to-late 19th century, Arak and Farahan carpet weaving gained international fame, particularly in the U.S. and Europe, due to the display of exquisite handwoven pieces such as Sarough carpets. This study focuses on the Mostofi design, one of the traditional and authentic patterns of Arak and Farahan, which was woven and marketed from the late 19th century (13th century AH) to the mid-20th century. Simultaneously, this design was also popular in Bijar and Tabriz carpet-weaving schools. The Mostofi design features a modular composition with prominent elements such as spiral Eslimi, circular or oval floral motifs, and predominantly dark blue or azure backgrounds framed by red margins. This design represents a key aspect of the identity of the Arak and Farahan carpet-weaving tradition, although its production ceased decades ago. Only a few samples are now preserved in international collections. This study seeks to explore the historical origins and aesthetic and technical features of the Mostofi design.

Research Method

Due to the difficulty in locating authentic historical samples of this design, the initial search was conducted in the markets of Arak and Tehran, the primary hubs for producing and distributing Arak and Farahan carpets. However, no examples of old Mostofi designs were found. Subsequently,

attention was directed toward international online databases, where a few examples were identified. This study employs a qualitative and developmental approach with a descriptive-analytical methodology. Data collection is conducted through a combination of library research and investigation in reputable international databases. The statistical population includes 30 purposefully selected non-random samples.

Research Findings

Based on oral and market narratives in Arak, the Mostofi design likely entered the Arak and Farahan carpet-weaving system from Bijar, potentially originating from the Caucasus region before reaching Tabriz and subsequently Bijar. The Mostofi design is modular, featuring prominent motifs such as spiral Eslimi with a single rotation, miniature patterns within the spirals, small connecting floral motifs, and a central oval or circular floral motif with buds. The margins of the selected samples exhibit consistent aesthetic and compositional characteristics with few exceptions.

Conclusion

This study examined the Mostofi carpet design, one of the authentic and traditional patterns of the Arak and Farahan carpet-weaving schools. Eighteen samples were selected based on structural and content-based differences among a limited number of such carpets primarily sourced from reputable international databases. The Mostofi design is no longer woven in Iran, with only limited modern adaptations available, which are not widely accepted due to their design and color limitations. Historically, the Mostofi design was modular, consisting of background and margin elements. The background typically includes three components: paired spiral Eslimi, connecting floral motifs, and a central oval or circular floral motif with roses. Margin designs were largely uniform across samples, except for rare cases. The background color is predominantly dark blue, except in a few instances (samples 2, 6, 7, and 8) where black, azure, or cream was used. Margin colors, except for one onion-colored exception, were predominantly red. The Mostofi designs had dense and intricate patterns, with interconnected elements and small motifs filling the composition. Dimensions of the original Mostofi carpets ranged from 127 cm to 405 cm in width and 204 cm to 568 cm in length, reflecting their historical popularity and demand. In contrast, modern versions are smaller, typically woven in sizes of one and a half or two zar (traditional Persian units), with limited appeal due to weak design and color schemes. While the origins of the Mostofi design in Arak and Farahan remain unclear, it is likely the same age as its counterparts in Bijar and Tabriz. Recent inappropriate change and distortion, including rude Eslimi and unconventional color schemes, have further reduced its popularity. Additionally, Bijar and Tabriz Mostofi carpets are generally smaller than those from Arak and Farahan.

Keywords: Arak (Sultanabad), carpet design, Farahan, Mostofi patterns.