

## **A Comparative Study of Botanical Mythology in Seljuk Pottery and a Textile Sample at the Victoria and Albert Museum**

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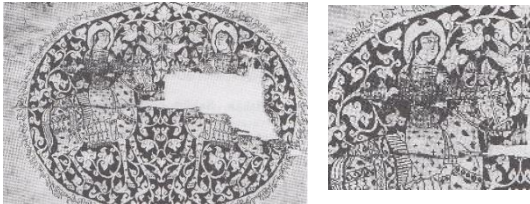
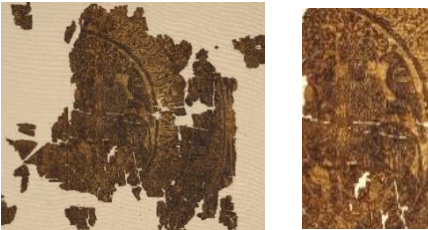

### **Introduction**

The motifs depicted in works of art, especially those belonging to ancient eras, alongside their decorative and ornamental aspects, serve functions that are closely linked to the myths, beliefs, and rituals prevalent at the time. In other words, these motifs are symbols that allude to specific beliefs or messages. One of the most important corresponding examples is an artwork produced during the Seljuk era, which has left behind a rich treasure trove particularly in the fields of textiles and ceramics. This research examines the role of botanical mythology on a Seljuk-era textile, numbered T.94-1937, kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and compares that with the motifs on Seljuk ceramics. Moreover, the intertextual relationship between the mythological motifs on the ceramics and the textile in question is explored, aiming to answer the semiotic position of the identical visual patterns found on Seljuk textiles and ceramics. A comparative mythological analysis will be presented, and the results will be examined to describe the form and motifs of the textiles and ceramics. Identifying the hidden conventions in the motifs from a mythological perspective, the study will also explore the connection between the role of water, the tree of life, and young people sitting beside the tree, and their relationship to botanical mythology.

### **Research Method**

Among Seljuk textiles, only six pieces with human figures have been identified by the authors. Of these six samples, only one piece of textile, kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum under the number T.94-1937, has mythological signs and is the focus of this research. This piece was selected and compared with six ceramics that were similar in forms to the piece. This article conducted a descriptive-analytical study that was carried out through a library study, comparing the motifs of a piece of textile kept in the Victoria and Albert Museum and six existing ceramics from the Seljuk period. The shared intellectual, mythological, and social concepts presented in them were, then, examined, and their shared functions were identified and categorized. Since up to now, many researchers and scholars have studied Seljuk textiles, ceramics and mythological motifs, two groups of researches were directly and indirectly related to our purpose. The first group were those that provided mere information about Seljuk textiles and ceramics. The second group were those who had examined the works of art from a mythological perspective.









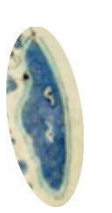












Table 1: Seljuk Textile with Human Figure (Research by the Authors, 2023)

Raw	Seljuk-Era Textile	Source	Theme
1		(URL1)	Twins, Amshāspandān
2		(Feriye 1995: 157)	A young man with a falcon
3		(URL2)	A young man with a falcon
4		(Hillenbrand, 1994: 216)	The youth among the flowers
5		(URL3)	A young man with a falcon
6		(URL4)	Harpy

### Research Findings

To interpret the motifs on the textile and ceramics under discussion, the researchers conducted a comparative analysis by referring to other related texts. Visually, all the samples (ceramics and textile) discussed in this research feature the depictions of two young individuals along with a tree and a pool of water, which are interpreted based on mythology. In the selected textile, the artist relying on the general form of a medallion, enclosed by Kufic script, along with plant motifs that fill the spaces between them, has created an overall geometric and repeatable form. The ceramic samples under examination also have a general circular design. In the composition of the textile and ceramics, two figures are seated on either side of a tree with a pool of water flowing beneath them.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Motifs on the Selected Textile and Ceramics (By the Authors)

Raw	Image Details						
1							
Comparison of motifs	Both the textile and ceramics depict a tree between two human figures.						
Analysis of motifs	The sacred tree symbolizes the connection between God and humans, holy spirits, the center of the universe, and nature. The cypress tree, due to its evergreen nature, symbolizes immortality and eternity.						
2							
Comparison of motifs	Both the textile and ceramics feature a pond of water beneath the tree.						
Analysis of motifs	Water symbolizes purity, transparency, purification, immortality, eternal life, and wisdom.						
3							
Comparison of motifs	Both the textile and ceramics depict two figures or groups seated opposite each other.						
Analysis of motifs	The figures could represent twins, or deities like Khordad and Amordad, who are intermediaries between the creator and creation and guide the righteous towards the Heaven. It's difficult to determine if the figures are male or female. Symmetry and balance are evident in all seven pieces.						

Given the sacredness of water and plants in cultural and historical backgrounds, as seen in Table 2, the use of trees and water alongside human figures was not merely for decoration. It served as a

platform for expressing the artist's beliefs and convictions—archetypes that originate from the collective unconscious. The tree, in its mystical meaning, refers to the interconnectedness of all living things on the Earth throughout time. The vitality, growth, and liveliness of the tree, combined with water, ensure the continuation of life on Earth.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this article suggest that all motifs employed in the aforementioned works have had a cultural function, reflecting the prevailing beliefs of their time. Given the semiotic significance of visual patterns, mythological symbols are consistently manifested both in Seljuk textiles and in Seljuk ceramics. Furthermore, the motifs depicted on these artifacts represent the beliefs, convictions, and life style of that era. The motifs and symbols employed in these works held functional meanings for the people of the time and were not merely repetitions of the past or mere decorative elements. These findings offer a new perspective on the worldview prevalent during the Seljuk era, a worldview that these motifs have preserved and, at times, transmitted with necessary modifications based on the needs of the time.

**Keywords:** myth, Botanical motifs, textile, Seljuk ceramics, Victoria and Albert Museum.