

Influence of Cultural Factors on the Developments of the Design and Pattern of the Safavid and Qajar Carpets (with an Emphasis on Floral and Bush Motifs)

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Introduction

Naturalism in the Safavid's carpet gradually became important. In keeping with the mystical issues and the existence of Sufism thoughts in this period, attention to nature and naturalism in various arts, including carpet weaving, became common, although symbolism also enjoyed a special place in a large part of the classical carpets of the Safavid era. This trend continued in later periods, and despite its ups and downs, especially between the Safavid period and the mid-Qajar period, two styles, circular and broken, with symbolism and naturalism, were observed in the Iranian carpets of the 18th century and later. In traditional arts, plant arrays and numerous species of trees and types of flowers have a special place. These arrays reflect the thoughts and visions that man has had in dealing with nature from the distant past. The tree is more of a symbol of the cosmos, which is the connection between Earth and Sky. In Islamic narratives, plants are also of great importance, and this has been raised several times in the Quran. Given the place of plants in ancient mythology and religious beliefs, it is not surprising for plant elements to appear as an integral part of traditional Iranian art. These arrays include types of trees, flowers of Shah Abbas, Eslimi, Khataei, and types of bushes. They have been used sometimes in natural, objective form and sometimes in abstract forms.

Research Method

This research is developmental in terms of purpose and descriptive-analytic in method. The method of collecting data is library study, using books articles and specialized theses and authoritative electronic databases. Statistical samples in this study include 37 samples of Safavid carpets and 62 samples of Qajar carpets selected by theoretical saturation method. The study focuses on the types of flowers and bushes in the carpets of the Safavid and Qajar periods and considers identifying, categorizing, and examining the types of these motifs in the carpets of these periods. This study not only examines various cultural factors that have influenced the appearance of flowers and bushes in carpets of this era but also evaluates their impacts.

Research Findings

Regarding the use of floral motifs in Iranian art, it can be stated that these motifs, encompassing various flowers, shrubs, and trees, are rendered in an abstract, symbolic, and simultaneously decorative manner. This tradition originated in pre-Islamic visual arts and continued robustly until the late Qajar period. In most cases, plant motifs carry symbolic meanings, especially when combined with human, animal, and mythological figures. Beyond their ornamental function, they embody key concepts in Iranian culture and art such as the Garden of Eden, transcendence of the material world,

the source of life, eternal vitality, happiness, optimism, and good fortune. Although plant motifs constituted the majority of decorative elements in Safavid carpets, they lacked the diversity and abundance seen in the Qajar period. Safavid artistry often emphasized abstract and stylized representations of botanical elements. In contrast, the Qajar period imposed no such restrictions on the presentation and visualization of plant motifs. The use of floral elements gained particular prominence during this era, with specific flowers like roses, lilies, carnations, and marigolds being employed extensively in carpet decoration. Consequently, the endeavor to approximate nature is more evident in Qajar carpets. From the perspective of usage, symbolic aspects were considered in both periods. The designs and patterns of Safavid carpets, particularly their plant elements, find their roots in Shi'a culture, Sufism, and ancient Iranian traditions, converging under the overarching framework of Islam. Overall, the dominance of mystical symbolism over carpet design, especially in its motifs, is apparent. During the Qajar period, however, carpet weaving was significantly influenced by a Western naturalistic approach. The focus of Qajar designers shifted from the hidden meanings and concepts within motifs towards their decorative value, emphasizing diversity and pluralism. In the realm of floral elements, external influences, with Westernization at the forefront, led to the flourishing and expansion of new, naturalistic designs.

Conclusion

Measuring the extent and nature of cultural influences can be pursued through both an evaluation of contributing factors and a direct comparison of motifs in Safavid and Qajar carpets. The principal differences between the carpets of these two periods are evident in the types of flowers and plants depicted, the arrangement and composition of motifs, and the variety of their shapes, sizes, and density. In Safavid designs, round, multi-petalled floral patterns along with leafy, trumpet-shaped forms and a limited number of stylized natural flowers were most prevalent. In contrast, Qajar designs incorporated a wider array of natural flowers such as carnations, orchids, and roses, rendered in either naturalistic, abstract, curvilinear, or angular forms. The floral bushes in Safavid carpets are typically symmetrical, featuring large, identical blossoms or detailed, leafy shrubs. Qajar bushes, however, demonstrate greater diversity, ranging from highly patterned specimens with varied, colorful flowers to lush, prolific, and densely packed shrubs. A significant differentiating factor is the type of flowers used: those in Safavid carpets are largely confined to abstract, geometric, round, and multi-petalled forms, whereas Qajar examples encompass a broader spectrum, from flowering shrubs to elaborate trees. Color usage also distinguishes two periods; the plant elements in Safavid carpets predominantly feature conventional and limited color palettes. Qajar carpets, on the other hand, utilize a wider and more diverse range of colors, further enhancing their variety. The formation and development of Safavid patterns were the result of various social, cultural, and socio-political influences. Key factors include the prominent customs and traditions of the era, the influence of Shi'a thought, the particular patronage of Shah Abbas I and Shah Tahmasb, other courtly support, the existence of royal carpet workshops, the prosperity of various arts (especially weaving), advances in design and technical weaving facilities, foreign relations, and the export of carpets as gifts and cultural commodities. These elements collectively contributed to the notable advancement of the art form during the Safavid period. During the Qajar period, various cultural, social, and political developments similarly impacted the art of the era, especially carpet weaving. The most important of these include the profound influence of European culture, the rise of an aristocratic art market, a decentralized and diverse production structure that expanded to non-urban areas and villages, and the presence of foreign companies in the carpet production sector. Consequently, Iranian carpets, like other art forms of the time, were affected by the discourse of modernity. The emergence of designs that diverged from traditional motifs is consistent with this modernizing approach.

Keywords: Iranian carpets, Safavid period, Qajar period, Cultural factors, Plant motifs, bushes, flower Motif.