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## **The Evolution of Iranian Carpet Designs with the Influence of Islam and Chinese art; Ilkhanid, Timurid, Safavid**

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### **Abstract**

This article reviews and analyses the characteristics of Persian rugs through a historical background in the Islamic era, and design motifs that applied to the Persian rugs during the beginning of the Islamic era in Iran. Ilkhanid, Timurid, and Safavid as Islamic dynasties are considered, which were influenced by Chinese design motifs and religious style during said periods. Exemplar rug designs have been selected from illustrations from Shahnameh books (Demotte, Ferdowsi, Shah Tahmasp). Islam and Chinese artists and philosophers had a significant influence on the Persian rug. With the presence of Mongols and Islam in Iran and the establishment of the Ilkhanid dynasty, Chinese design elements had a noticeable effect on the Persian rug. The Mongols with no significant cultural and artistic backgrounds borrowed Chinese design style with Islamic taste applied a new form to their artifacts and goods, which is also highly evident in Iranian carpet design that continued for centuries.

**Keywords:** Decorative design, Design history, Design culture, Islamic design, Persian rug.

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## Introduction

The Islamic era in Iran began after the Sassanid period (224 to 651 A.D.) as a result of the Arab conquest. Although the Arabs established sovereignty, most of the countries' administration, from bureaucratic affairs to industry, was still carried out by the Iranians since the Arabs were not familiar with Iran's internal affairs, as Lestrangle (1905) mentions in his book "The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate."

Art and civilization were not an exception in this matter, George Zidane (1907) in his book "The History of Islamic Civilization" explains that Arabs who were deeply united, had been able to conquer different countries and territories from China to Gibraltar, and took possession of the art of these sovereign states. Islam was able to start a new tradition with a mix of the spiritual world. This means that at that time, without the taste of Islamic thought and compatibility no theory and idea had a place and would soon be out of reach. The issue of religion in the field of art is important since it has had a direct impact on the art of Iranian carpet design (Hasko 1995).

This Persian traditional art style, such as using blue color on tiling, spiral motifs on carpets, and the use of flowers like Shah Abbasi flower, applying on book layout design became the most famous art form after the arrival of Islam. It was used in many Arab-dominated countries, where it played an essential role in the composition of Persian art and, more specifically, in the Persian rug, an international and well-known handcraft. Islamic designs and patterns influenced carpet weaving designs in Iran. The effects of symbolism influence Iranian art before and after Islam, and Persian rug, as applied art, shows that the Iranian rug designers used symbolism in its best way. The Persian rug was distinctive compared to the other nations during the Islamic era being was based on its decorative elements, which were designed purposefully and used to express the sacred space in a symbolic way (Rahnavard, 1999). Many of the books that have survived from that early Islamic period have spoken of excellent quality rugs, which demonstrate the importance of carpet as a valued object and promoting the art of carpet weaving in Iran for furnishing mosques and performing religious practices on them (Bayhaqi, 1977).

Two significant structural changes occurred with the arrival of Islam seen in carpet design. The first was the prohibition of human and animal figures, and the second was the encouragement for the designers to simplify their designs and prevent them from exterior ornamental design. (Islami, 2005). During this early Islamic time, human and animal figures on the prayer carpets were not permitted. However, in some cases and a small number, these figures were still found on the carpets, along with calligraphy, hunting pictures, and flowers, which described as common Persian motifs in Arabic Manuscripts that left from the early presence of Islam in Iran (Bayhaqi, 1977). These new principles changed over time and we see animal motifs (hunting scene) and decorative splendor returning to Iranian carpet designs becoming a routine pattern during the fifteenth century, the Safavid era. (Rahnavard, 1999).

Since then, most carpets produced in Islamic countries were based upon Iranian culture but were influenced by Islamic beliefs that tended to show the unity in plurality and the plurality in unity. Carpet designers around the World have seen this aspect of Islamic belief from the perspective of Iranian culture, and this had led Iranian designs to be a source of inspiration to other weavers. The best example of this is an Iranian motif called Eslimi (arabesque motif) attributed to Islam and Muslims, which initially goes back to the Parthian Kingdom (247 B.C. ~ 224 A.D.), and the Sassanid time (224~651 A.D.) often found on silver plates and wall carvings (Razavi; Azarpad, 2004). This might be due to the use of the spiral representing infinite movement, that depicts the order of nature as well as portraying the monotheistic thinking of Islam.

Carpet weaving that was initially transmitted as a partial industry from one generation to the next, in the time of Ilkhanid, from the Timurid dynasty and during the Safavid era gradually became an advanced industry and the craft of the courtyard. During this period, carpets with high quality were woven and exported to the countries of the Far East and Europe. During the Islamic era, these carpets, which firstly manufactured to cover the floor and walls, became a favored piece by high-class families.

One of the best sources of information on the evolution of carpet motifs and the influence of Chinese style from the beginning of the Islamic period to the Safavid era is the examination of carpets depicted in miniatures of the Shahnamehs. Through these illustrated books, it is possible to track the evolution of motifs from the Ilkhanid era with the influence of Islam and the presence of Chinese style. In the Herat-Timurian painting style, rug motifs began to transmit from geometric style to a mixture of geometric and spiral styles. In addition, with the onset of the Safavid and urbanizing carpet industry in that time, and the influence of Chinese art through political and commercial interactions, as well as the presence of Iranian artists from Herat style, Persian rug came in the forefront and reached its highest glamor.

## **Methods**

This review paper attempts to examine the Chinese and Persian motifs of carpets of the Islamic era during Ilkhanid, Timurid, and Safavid dynasties through the remained miniatures of these dynasties, as well as using the books and research papers written about ancient carpets of Iran by international scholars such as James Hall (*Iconography in East and West Art*, 2001), and Oglu Najib (*Geometry and Decoration in Islamic Architecture*, 2008). Some scholars may not consider the visual arts as a reliable source for the field of rug design research. However, due to the lack of objective evidence, the surviving artifacts are worthy of examination as they provide extant visual examples. This paper has been conducted with the help of all means and indications to assist the history of Iranian carpets.

## **Symbol definition in carpet design**

Before going forward to studying the types and meaning of the Persian carpet motifs, it is essential to understand why these symbols created to be a part of people living style. Symbolism played an important role in all countries with different cultures, methods, and beliefs. It created to make a common language among different nations. The very first ones were easy to understand. However, the more a nation civilized, the more complicated it got through time. Not only the development of a country, but also its relationship with others through traveling, wars, and business resulted in many borrowed forms from one another (Afrogh, 2014).

Persian symbols are presented in Iran in various arts, such as in painting, sculpture, and crafts like rugs. Symbols could generally be taken from visual and conventional natural signs. There is a close relationship between the sign, its origin, and its meaning. Visual cues between the sign and its meaning are objectively similar, but not necessarily in countries with spiritual beliefs like Iran and China. Most of the motifs designed in Asian and Middle Eastern countries may represent an object or concept in daily life or from the philosophy they practice. In general, a form is a symbol when it signifies something more than its explicit and direct meaning.

Before the Islamic period, all symbols often presented in symmetry form, especially in very first forms of rug designs, textiles, and weaving. One of the most famous natural symbols of the pre-Islamic period is the lotus flower, and it grows toward the sky, which also was an important element in ancient times (Jouleh, 2002).

Among the various forms, the circle has been the most completed geometrical form and has a special significance in the symbolism of all historical periods. This form expresses the totality of the human psyche in various aspects, including the relationship between man and nature. In the east visual arts, the circle is a concept of perfection, and it is a symbol of the creation of the world as well as the concept of time. The circle is also a symbol of the continuous circular motion of the sky, which reminds the audience of the Chinese form of Yin and Yang applied to many forms of Persian rug elements. From all, these forms had a great reflection on the final design of the motifs as an individual item and as the whole. Flower designs, Chinese clouds, Chinese ribbons, Swastika, in and out design, and many others all presented in some spiral and round form or their overall design is associated with circle form. These are the common forms among Iran and China.

### **How Chinese art influenced the Islamic version of the Persian rug**

The long-term relationship between Iran and China goes back to ancient times (around 200 B.C.). This resulted in many common points in political, cultural, commercial, and religious trade. The similarities in their myths, and the influence of Buddhism and Islam in these two countries, along with the vibrant role of trade, may have been the beginning of Chinese artistic influence in Iran long before the Ilkhanid kingdom (Azary, 1988). For instance, in the *Shahnameh* written by Ferdowsi (977–1010 C.E.) mentions Fereydon, one of the kings of Iran, who sent one of his sons to the lands of the East (China and Tibet) to study Buddhism and learn more about Chinese lifestyle (Amozegar, 1995).

China's first visit to Iran date back to the Parthian King Mehrdad II (124 to 88 B.C.). Moreover, later, a Parthian prince travelled to China and stayed for twenty years in a Chinese court to learn about the Buddhist religion. Also, during Sassanid era Christianity was spread in China by Iranians (Azary, 1988). After the defeat of Yazdegerd III (632 to 651 A.D.), the last king of the Sasanian Empire by Arabs, Iran, and China's relationships grew, developing more than before.

A strong influence of Chinese style also occurred during the Mongol invasion of Iran (1219 to 1221A.D.). During the Ilkhanid era (the Mongol dynasty in Iran), a strong link emerged between the two most important centers of the civilization of that time, Iran and China. As a result, this relationship, especially with the Iranian national arts, began to take a new turn, and gradually culminating at the end of the Timurid kingdom. This new generation of rulers changed the face of Iranian art and introduced Chinese taste in parallel with Islamic beliefs into Persian art.

The Ilkhanid era witnessed significant political and religious changes due to its founders, who were Mongols and Muslims, having a different value system. This new style of art was adopted by the Timurid and Safavid cultures, which resulted in a flourishing carpet design during the late Timurid period, as seen in the Herat style (Fifteenth century) continuing to the end of the Safavid era (1736). The designs of Iranian art were also influenced by the arrival of Chinese artists into Iran and their interaction with Iranian artists during the Safavid time. However, the originality of Iranian designs inspired by Sassanid and Iranian-Islamic patterns was still preferred over Chinese designs (Afrogh, 2014).

The textiles of the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods became similar to the Chinese style. For instance, In the Mongol and Timurid miniatures, fabrics and costumes are frequently drawn in Chinese style (Shirzad, 2011). Some Chinese style motifs like dragon forms and floral ornaments, such as anemones, can be seen. The Lotus flower was an important Chinese decorative motif. Nevertheless, the lotus originated as a decorative element in Egypt and Syria. It then transported to India and from there traveled to China with the Buddhist religion. Chinese clouds, which sometimes combined with Islamic forms such as arabesque, are also common motifs associated with Chinese artifacts, known as the Eslimi motif (Afrogh, 2014).

The Chinese motif, combined with Islamic-Iranian art, was used in the surviving miniatures from the Shahnameh. For example, the image depicting Zahak's enthronement in Shahnameh shows a floor covering with a large octagonal design and a dragon pattern inside it that is reminiscent of Chinese style. In the context of the painting "Mourning on Alexander's coffin," there is a large carpet where the text resembles that of another miniature brick surface in Iran, with its exterior being a white Kufic inscription in red with a rectangular frame resembling a lotus flower that represents its Chinese origin.

## **Islamic Persian Rug**

### **Ilkhanid Rugs**

As mentioned above, the Ilkhanid is the name of a Mongol dynasty who ruled Iran from 1256 to 1349 A.D. established by Genghis Khan that was continued by his children. This dynasty introduced an important period of Iranian history in promoting Islam. They entered Iran with the Buddhist religion. However, in 1295 and with the conversion of Genghis Khan to Islam and also removing religious prejudices and creating freedom in religion opened a new aspect of religion to the Iranian view (Razavi, 2018). The Ilkhanid also laid the groundwork for the creation of Shi'ism, which later became the main cult of Iranian Islam (Azary, 1988).

From the beginning of Ilkhanid by Genghis Mogul to the beginning of the Safavid, most of history occupied by military conflict. For this reason, no rugs survived from this time. All information and comments about Ilkhanid rugs sourced from the written and illustrated examples on which the rugs were designed or explained. Of course, this was specific to the Iranian region, since in nearby countries such as Egypt or even in European countries like Spain, examples of rugs are found (14- 15 A.D.) (Razavi, 2018). During this artistic, cultural reform, the rug received more attention than before by the Ghazan Khan (son of Genghis Khan), which were shown in a large number of precious rugs illustrated or explained in the literature of this period. Also, in the thirteenth century, the Royal palace of Ghazan Khan was covered with carpets from Fars (a city in southern Iran) (Shirzad, 2011). Ibn Battuta in his travelogue spoke of carpets inside the shrine of Imam Reza, he also specifically mentioned a green carpet belonging to the ruler of Izeh (a city in Khuzestan province) (Ibn Battuta, 1958:188).

Unfortunately, there is not a known surviving example of the Persian rug from the Ilkhanid period. What has remained from this time, for comparison, are mostly Anatolian examples with none surviving from Iran. Although, these examples should still be regarded as a source since they were influenced by the Iranian style. The evidence left from books and wall decorations, like tiles, indicates the beginning of the presence of spiral and floral forms that are close to nature alongside the geometric forms (Hasko, 1995). For example, the images in the book of Shahnameh of Demotte or the motifs on the tiles present curved and softer forms than their previous designs. Early forms of the motifs that later adorned the Safavid carpets started from this time, and they are illustrated in the paintings, not only on the rugs but also on the architectural design of the Ilkhanid era (Oglu, 2008).

Geometric patterns applied as the base of decorative motifs of Ilkhanid are more reflecting the decorative forms rather than representing an idea. These forms of patterns are used according to the rules of geometry to create iterative drawings. These patterns are undoubtedly one of the most beautiful Islamic geometric patterns, and their aesthetic is mainly due to their high degree of symmetry. In Islamic art, along with its beauty, motifs show the belief of unity and the order of the Universe, with each carrying a type of energy (Barzin, 1976). In mythical thought of Oriental art all signs (Geometric and natural symbol) have a magical power which humankind has always strived to achieve through the combination or repetition of these signs that are rooted in their unshakable belief. (Knight; Gerbran, 2006).

## Timurid Rugs

Start with a brief description of Timurid, as this section above on Ilkhanid. During the time of Mongols and Timurids, Iran extended its borders from the West to the Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent. The Timurid government concentrated on Samarkand as their capital and gathered artists and architecture to extend the development of their new capital. Apart from having trading relations with Yemen, Egypt and the Levant, Iranians had also developed their traveling destinations through the western parts of the region during this era.

Rene (1912) writes in his travelogue "From Khorassan to Bakhtiari" that in that time apart from the scattered and not fully developed looms, Persian textiles reached the point of perfection." After the death of Timur (1405), the Iranian art industry became more vibrant with the efforts of his son and grandchildren. Razavi (2004) gave a description of the fine silk carpets and mats in the Timurid court that were inspired by the art of bookmaking at that time. Hafiz-i Abru, a renowned Iranian historian and geographer in the Timurid era, in his book "Majmaal-Tawarikh (1405-1447), also gave a brief reference to the exquisite carpets of that period. From these contemporary accounts, it may be suggested that the Timurid carpet weaving industry reached perfection and weaving a "good carpet" was a part of the decorative arts, especially in Herat city (Razavi, 2018).

During the Timurid era, many features of Iranian art changed with the influence of Chinese culture. The work of Iranian artists was profoundly transformed so that among scholars, this period is known as the time of perfection of Islamic art. The influence of Timurian carpet designs can be seen in the miniatures of that period. The best reference here is the Carpets designed and decorated in miniatures done by Kamal Aldin Behzad Herati (1450-1535). Since the painters of that period used their artistic skills in different industries, such as book designing and architecture, considering that the carpets displayed in the miniatures of that era are very similar and perhaps even copied from their original ones, it may be suggested that the same artists also created the carpet design. Herat style miniatures may be cited in the discussion of carpet design because they reflect other aspects of the Timurid people, such as clothes and face types, as well as displaying Herat rituals from that time (Figure. 1). Besides, the artists of the Herat style have left many exemplifications, which strongly suggests that these carpets were not designed accidentally (Figure. 1).



Figure 1. Geometric design, Herat style (1494), Source: Nezami's *Khamseh*.

The miniatures left from that era show the presence of rounded shapes (Figures. 2-3), repeated octagonal, ornamented stars (Figure. 4), including geometric patterns (Figure. 5), and Kufic-derived patterns on the margins. Although in many sources, the design of the Timurid rug is limited to geometric motifs, the curved-floral motifs and Eslimi patterns are also seen in two examples in the book of Nezami's *Khamseh* from the Herat style. Razavi, in his book "Iran's carpet" (2004), also explains the possibility that some Safavid rugs are mistakenly attributed to the Safavid period when

in fact, they might belong to the Timurid era. As with the Ilkhanid era, there appear to be no surviving examples of rugs from the Timurid era.



Left to right:

Figure 2. An example of Timurid rug with Chinese cloud ribbons, Jami book. Source: <https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki>.

Figure 3. A miniature of Saadi's Golestan, drawn by Prince Baisekhar Mirza at the Art Workshop, designed with Chinese knot and start-shape motifs. Dublin. Chester Beat Library. Source: <http://www.wikiwand.com/fa>.



Left to right:

Figure 4. Nezami's Khamseh. Carpet with floral motif, Reza Abbasi Museum. Photo courtesy: Ladan Abouali.

Figure 5. Nezami's Khamseh. Carpet with Geometric design. Reza Abbasi Museum, Iran. Photo courtesy: Ladan Abouali.

Timurid art, which recognized for book design, was regarded as being at the peak of the art at that time, and this probably affected other branches of the arts such as carpet design. This is possible as similar design patterns and elements are being taken from the Timurid book covers, which can be seen on Safavid rugs. For instance, Medallion design – Corner is also found on the Safavid carpets in terms of mathematical proportions, which is accurately designed to fit with the size and proportions of a book cover of the Timurid art (Hall, 2001; Shirzad, 2011). If Timurid carpets reached their peak, it was due to Shahrokh's (the son of Timur Shah) efforts. Herat city has witnessed the rise of Iranian art, and the art of carpet design was no exception. Attention to carpet details in illustrations from that time shows an essential characteristic of Timurid art.

### **Safavid rug**

The Safavid Empire (1501-1722) was a time of political stability and unity in Iran. This stability flourished throughout the crafts and art, especially in the carpet weaving industry. Tabriz, Qazvin, and Isfahan respectively became important carpet weaving centers of Iran. A significant number of carpets have survived from Safavid time thanks to all the workshops opened by the help of Safavid kings like Shah Ismail (1501- 1524). With an artistic taste of Shah Ismail's son Shah Tahmasp (1514-1576), the carpet industry of Iran experienced the ultimate in beauty and elegance and of course, the fruit of this maturity was later represented in Isfahan and during the Shah Abbas time (1571-1629), (Razavi, 2018). Isfahan may not be the first capital of the Safavids. However, it is considered to be at the peak of the Safavid dynasty. It is recognized that it was in this city that the art of carpet weaving reached a high level of development and innovation.

There is doubt about the authenticity of the carpets found during the first years of the Safavid rule among scholars. There are mainly three different notions that raise these concerns. Henry (1912) refers to Safavid carpets that were inspired by the Timurid (Rene, 1912). While some scholars like Cecil Edwards (*The Persian Carpet: A Survey of the Carpet-weaving Industry of Persia*, 1953), believe that, Tabriz carpets originally came from Timurid time. He explains that Shah Ismail spent his time consolidating his rule and fighting against Turks and Uzbeks rather than thinking about building carpet-weaving workshops. Besides, considering that Tabriz city was one of the bases of Iranian carpet weaving during Ghazan Khan ruling the Mongol dynasties. Finally, some sources like Nasiry (1995) attribute the carpets found in the early Safavid to the Kara Koyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu, which ruled from 1375 to 1501 and chose Tabriz city as their capital.

In the field of decorative pattern, some of the motifs which adorned these rugs are the same as the ones that decorated Safavid textiles, and buildings. The artists from the Herat style came to Tabriz during the reign of Shah Isma'il (1487-1524), providing the first bridge between the Herat style and the Tabriz style. During this time, the presence of Chinese artists and their style was also noted. The Iranians accepted the Chinese version of art as its original form, and the outcome was a combination of native Iranian art with a mixture of Chinese practice and style. For instance, the Lotus flower was one of those Chinese motifs that were used in the Herat style that mostly used it as both a repeated and individual pattern. It was also mixed with other natural motifs which looked like a real flower with their branches and leaves following the old Chinese style (Figures. 4,6). The motif of the Chinese clouds ribbon was another favorite image that was also presented on the Timurid rugs in the miniatures (Figure. 6).



Figure. 6. Safavid rugs. A great combination of Iranian and Chinese motifs: Chinese cloud ribbon, Chinese knot, Shah Abbasi flower, and Eslimi. The Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb, Reza Abbasi Museum, Iran. Photo courtesy: Ladan Abouali.

The Safavid carpet, in general, did not only embody the motifs of the past but also created a new pattern to the name of the Palmette flower, also known as the Shah Abbasi flower, which still exists in the Iranian carpet (Rahnavard, 1999). The critical point here is that in Safavid carpet designs, we see the urbanization of this art and the transformation of traditional and straightforward geometric motifs into intricate designs of Eslimi as well as floral compositions with circular branches (Afrogh, 2014).

### **The common Chinese decorative motifs on Timurid, Ilkhanid, and Safavid rugs**

Pope (1083) believes that the investigation of carpet design may be determined by three criteria of weaving: locality, type of weaving, and the carpet design. The simplest classification is based on the design of the carpet design (Pop, 1083) The presence of mythical animals, flower gardens, birds, and the shape of the Chinese cloud (which, is slightly different from its Chinese type being of smaller size), and winding branches represent some of the myths that came from China during the Ilkhanid period and then transferred to the Safavid period (Afrogh, 2014). The Shah Abbasi flower is a well-known rug motif of the Safavid time which is also said to be taken from the Chinese Anemone During the Timurid period, Chinese motifs entered Iranian art by way of homogenization. For example, the Lili ivy came close to the vine ivy, which was transformed into the famous Eslimi motif (Islami, 2005). The Eslimi pattern mixed with the flowers of that period became the most important pattern of the Timurid and Safavid rugs. In the following, the four most important rug designs and their common motifs among these three empires are discussed.

### **Swastika and Star-shaped motif**

One of the attractive ways to design in Persian art is to design shapes that fill the gaps between actogram or polygonal, such as the geometric patterns of the four-pointed star and the Swastika (Hall, 2001). Islam has used symbolic imagery to communicate better. A blend of Iranian culture within the divine scent and the Swastika is one of those international symbols that is difficult to establish where it originated, but it could fit into any number of cultural and religious visual languages. In Iran, this motif is first evidenced in the Elamite era (2700 – 539 B.C.), where it is seen on ceramics (Afrogh, 2014). Examples are also known on textiles materials such as fabrics, but also it

is seen on the carpets of China, Samarkand, and Iran. This motif is very close to the symbol of the sun, a form that shows rotation relating to the sun. Another form of this symbol is witnessed on the carpets of Iran depicted in the form of Aryan Suns with eight arms (Hall, 2001).



Figure 7. Swastika motif shows on the Carpet beside the bed. Source: Demotte Shahnameh. Figure

The Swastika was introduced into China by the Indian Buddhists, who presented its meanings to the Chinese. Examples of these meanings are happiness, and positive thoughts. In Iranian art the Swastika's role might have experienced some fluctuations in its employment as a design motif, but it never diminished its meaning (Afrogh, 2014). It symbolizes action, emersion, orbit, and permanent regeneration. The most common repeated Swastika motif presented on the rug is common in every era and is associated with the notions of goodwill (Knight; Gerbran, 2006). There is an original style about this sign and the number of its arms; the numerical value of the Swastika is sixteen, a symbol of the strong progress of reality and the World (Salehi, 2006). The Swastika's four facets represent the symbolism of the number four with a female value. The Swastika shows the fundamental similarity in meaning in both China and Iran. In Chinese culture, the symbol of Yin is a symbol of womanhood, which is attributed to a parallel, earthly energy (Imami, 2002). In Iranian art, from the earliest ages, even the prehistoric times, number four was used to represent what is solid, and tangible like the square shape, as a symbol of the Earth (Abolhasani, 2017). The relationship of the four with the Swastika with its four facets also represent uniqueness, abundance, and its universality. The four main directions, four winds, four pillars, four moons, four seasons, four temperaments, four rivers, four paradises, four gardens, the sign of life, and four arms of the Swastika are all regarded as significant. The number four had also been a symbol of the Universe's potential to create number five (Rahnavard, 1999).

John (1941) states that Swastika, which originated in Iran, also was a noted pattern in the art of the Far East. It is also noted by Afrogh (2014) that it traveled with the Indian monks to Eastern Asia as a sign of good luck.

The star-shaped motif in the eyes of observers may be seen as a reminder of the form of the Swastika, being four equidistant points that are likely to show four geographical directions (Figure. 7). In Islamic art, the star and cross pattern first appeared in the ninth-century Samarra. The star is a symbol of God (Imami, 2002). Usually, the quality of the light is part of the star that comes to mind, and therefore, star is considered a source of light. In Islamic thought, the star is the embodiment of faith in the night to protect the believer from all obstacles that come in the way of God (Oglu, 2008).

### **In and out fish design**

In and out fish design has always been a famous and liked motif by Iranians. It is now of course seen in different forms in many Iranian cities based on the geographical taste of people it was originally called "Herati motif", consisting of a combination of two rotating leaves with a flower in the middle that reminds of Yin and Yang Chinese symbol. Although there is no document that links this Iranian motif to Chinese, it still can't be denied that Mongols might have brought it into Iran. Later Herati artists changed it into a new form like fish and used different elements which remind of that fish form. For instance, the popular leaves form that is very similar to the heads of two fish that was the reason for the new name as "in and out fish design" (Afrogh, 2014).

This motif was one of the most popular patterns during the Safavid era, but even during that period there were carpets with this design element that were attributed to the Herat style and the Timurid times. A good example is the Emperor carpet held at the New York Metropolitan Museum. It should be recognized that the famous Safavid carpet designs were not created suddenly and owe much of their aesthetic beauty to the Herat designers of the Timurid era.

### **Prayer-nich design**

\There is no surviving example of the Timurid carpet that incorporates the so-called "Prayer-nich design." However, with noticing the Prayer-nich design presented on the remaining fabrics from that time and considering the role of Islam and Islamic art as well as the vibrant presence of monuments and religious sites, Prayer-nich design could be visualized as a typical rug design on Timurid's rugs. This is the design that is still employed today to design prayer rugs. Its arc shape form, which also used in Chinese architecture, used to point to the direction that Muslims pray toward.



*Figure 8. An example of a Timurid-era fabric with a prayer design. Berlin Museum, Germany. Source: Razavi, The evolution of carpet weaving in Iran.*

### **Palmette flower design (Shah Abbasi flower)**

The palmette flower design was based on the famous Shah Abbasi flower, which was accompanied by other flowers and Islamic spiral motifs. This flower has been widely used in "Overall flower design" and "medallion design or "Corner" designs.

## Conclusion

The Persian rug had been known internationally, although its design elements, forms, and figures, has changed from time to time. It always kept its origin with adding an Iranian taste into all elements of design from the borrowed patterns to colors, size, etc. With the introduction of Islam and the start of the Iranian Chinese government (Ilkhanid), the Persian rug started to change. These new changes were mostly applied to the motifs and created a mixed form of Iranian Chinese design. The very first compositions were designed in a repeated or individual geometric style. During the Timurid dynasty, this cycle broke under the influence of Islamic belief to show unity from the higher power, and the geometric motifs became closer to the curved form. All these changes are presented in the different books of Shahnameh, such as the example found in the Demotte, and Shahnameh of Shah Abbas, as well as the book of Khamseh- Nezami.

The influence of Chinese design expanded through the business and tourism relations with Iran during the 14th century. In that time, Chinese crafts' designs were disseminated enough to come to the attention of the Safavid kings, which led to the growth of tile work during the next centuries. These crafts not only presented their structure to Iranian artists, but they also brought their Chinese design elements, such as floral and animal motifs onto Persian carpets. In addition to numerous illustrated geometric motifs, the extant miniatures indicate the beginning of "medallion design – Corner" started from the Timurid time, which was taken from the book cover layout of that period.

In the first years of the Safavid presence in Iran, the Heratian artists were invited back to Tabriz city by the Safavid court, and that was the start of the new era for Iran's carpet design. The new spiral designs and design compositions later reached their highest point of appreciation and aesthetic acknowledgment in the second period of the Safavid kingdom in Isfahan city, with the new flower presented as the Shah Abbas flower. This new style was so eloquently developed and presented that it is still present in carpet design today.

In general, the most significant impact of Chinese art on the Iranian carpet was based on three primary reasons; the first and the most important one is the presence of the Mongols, having them as the ruling political power, next is the presence of Chinese artists from the late Ilkhanid period and during the Timurid time in Iran, and finally the strong cultural and economic relations between Iran and China during the Safavid time. The patterns that were adopted were mostly from Chinese ceramics, such as Chinese clouds, potted plants, and Chinese peony blossom (floral motif). Furthermore, animals like dragon and Phoenix, which were later incorporated into Safavid decorative elements circle and designed hunted sceneries.

The number of Chinese motifs present on the Iranian carpets became limited from the second period of the Safavid era (Isfahan city). However, that did not diminish the influence of Chinese culture in Iran. Even today, as the influence of modern culture and art, has overshadowed Iranian art, there is still a heated debate between Iranian and foreign scholars about China and its impact on Iran's art.

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