

DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v6i2.850

Citation: Ahani, L., Yaghoubzadeh, A., & Vandshoari, A. (2017). A Presentation and Classification of Pictorial Carpets of Qajar Era. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 6(2), 123-137. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v6i2.850>

A Presentation and Classification of Pictorial Carpets of Qajar Era

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Abstract

As one of Iranian cultural industries, carpet owns an ancient background and archaism. Primarily, it has been created due to the needs. Iranian hand-made carpet, as a symbol of Iranian art, which is culturally and nationally so important, through the years it has been a suitable bed for emanation of beliefs and credence of local artists, which its figures are projecting it. Carpets are full-view mirrors of Iranian artist's enthusiasm, emotions, and worldview. Along with other phenomenon of the time, pictorial carpets emerged and formed in the late 18th century, following evolutions in various art fields in Iran and while enlisting new possibilities, like printing pictures and images, gained a new expression in Iranian carpet weaving. Pictorial carpets were a major group of Iranian carpets in Qajar era. Therefore, studying and analyzing this group of newly emerged carpets will explain different aspects regarding the history of carpet weaving, especially about design and figure of carpets. Illustrations in carpet weaving could be related to various cultural, social, political, and artistry issues of the era. Here, while introducing effective factors in emergence of these types of carpets, we classify the pictorial carpets based on applied themes and topics. This article introduces the underlying causes in emergence of pictorial carpets, like influencing from western culture and art, attitudes toward realism, human oriented thoughts and emergence of photography and printing and their corresponding effect.

Keywords: Qajar era, Pictorial carpet, Persian carpet, Persian art, Theme.

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Introduction

Iranian cultural, and even national, identity is bound with Iranian carpet. Iranian carpet has ever had a function more than a woven craft to meet general needs. These figures and structures of carpet designing root in ancient myths, cultures, and costumes of this region. Therefore, carpet is known as Iranian Cultural Birth Certificate. Qajar era includes a vast and important part of Iranian carpet weaving history. In this relatively long period, designs and figures in carpets were both loyal to previous patterns and stable traditions and due to conditions and requirements of the time, experienced some changes and evolutions. Qajar era is one full of difficulties in the history of this region, which caused a new age in various social, political, and economical fields in Iranian history. It could be called the age of social, political, economic, and intellectual relations with West, which has a bilinear condition of influencing from West and resistance against its invasion. In field of cultural influences, this course is clearly visible.

From midst of Qajar era, major changes occurred in carpet art-industry in managerial, supportive, observational views and in dimensions, size, design, and figures. As at the end of 18th century, a sudden increasing rise of American and European demand for Iranian carpets, caused Iranian carpet to revive. Therefore, in producer regions preparations for mass production happened. Thus, the economical capabilities of carpets could get attentions from government's side. Indeed, from the late 19th century Iranian carpet has stepped into a new level, which its importance in Iranian trading and foreign earnings of recent decades is undeniable. Amongst factors playing a role in reputation of old and new carpets, establishment of grand world exhibitions, presenting Iranian handmade carpet in world famous museums, arts and crafts movement in England and similar phenomenon in Europe are important. The last one caused changes in ornamentation style and house furnishings, also an increase in purchasing power of middle class people of western countries, which helped to this demand (Ittig, 1996).

From one hand, an emergence of a kind of design and a new usage for handmade carpet is visible in this era, which pictorial carpets are indicating examples of this change in tastes. Various causes were identifiable for painting in carpets of this era. Some of them are, an attitude toward western art and naturalism, and effected by the relation with western culture, emergence of photography and appropriate framings, stone printing, teahouse painting, topics taken out of ancient Iranian culture and literature. Discovering of ancient sites, vast presentation of the works of previous eras which proposed going back to the topics of pre-Qajar eras made great changes in topics, figures and design of carpets (Vandshoari, 2008: 96).

In continue of Iranian painting tradition in Qajar era, artistic spirit, and the taste dominating on painting expression wholly changed. Popular usage of 16th century painting tradition, integration of European landscaping with symmetrical partitioning, prestigious perspectives,

Iranian different sense of colorology, applying penumbra, sculpturing, presentation of perspectives in views, buildings, human figures, and adding rich factors of decoration, all caused the creation of a new method, which had completely new and fresh principles, criteria, logic, and basics (Afarin, 2010: 65). The same method effected deigning of pictorial carpets. Therefore, subject selection and the form of presenting figures went under sort of change. On the other hand, counteractions between lines, figures, and stronger power of expression of pictographs in accordance with figures are the causes of a boom and spread in applying the mixture of line and figure in pictorial carpets of Qajar era. In this regard, we can find inscriptions with a topic related to the presented picture. Throughout the history, Iranian put special values on art and therefore, they have left great works, which are now decorating world museums. Iranian artists, using calligraphy and applying it in various forms like inscriptions and various handicrafts like clays, metals, production of textiles, and carpeting did preparations for the creation of valuable works, which Iranian woven arts with their special values are emanations.

Effective factors on the emergence of Qajar pictorial carpets

Pictorial carpets are those ones, which describe different historical, religious, fictional, or literary topics or they refer to a landscape. Mostly, they have narrative aspect and explain a specific issue. Although, they are Qajar achievements and they have been affected by the events of these two centuries, they contain signs of Iranian ancient moods, artistry, and cultural methods. “Here, regarding to the duration of previous traditions, cultural, social, and artistry conditions in carpet designs and figures have greatly changes. Thus, whatever seems important in carpets design and painting, and emanates as a revolution on the surface of the carpets, is a phenomenon called “Illustrations”, which is previously unprecedented in carpets” (Shayestehfar and Sabbaghpour, 2011: 63-74).

By the establishment of Safavi dynasty, and spread of new artistry and intellectual movements, now illustration, which before that time was only created to illustrate poems and stories, and didn't exceed from the size of books, was experiencing new changes. In natural and larges sizes, it emerged on the walls of palaces, facades of malls and bathrooms, under the tombs, and walls of shrines, and on the curtains of passion reading. In addition, in many other major illustrations emanated as a favorite subject for artists. 13th and 14th centuries are the centuries of illustrations spread in Iran. Generally, the emergence of these carpets in Qajar era could be related to various cultural and artistry factors like influencing from West, desire for realism in arts, human based thinking (humanism), and the emergence of printing and photography.

Influencing from West

Initial trading and political relations of Iran and European countries go back to the second half of 15th century and at the time of Aq-Qoyunlu dynasty. They then developed in Safavi era (Mohajer Afshar, 2005: 31). Vast relations with West, specifically in Qajar era, happened through different ways. For example, by frequent travels of kings and court, dispatching Iranian ambassadors or representatives to European countries with political or trading purposes, and by some political, religious, or trading boards, who were coming to Iran, or commuting of European tourists and artists to Iran, and propagation of European itineraries and coming of western painting and stamps, dispatching Iranian artists to Europe for learning western painting. All these factors caused a familiarity with western art and thought and a kind of passion for western illustrations. Gradually, it effected courts and then the common's view to art and life issues. "As the relations with western world became more and easier, the attitude toward Westernization⁴ reinforced and gradually changed into the dominant attitude on artistic space of Qajar era" (Naghani, 2009: 17).

In Qajar era, Iranian painting, while distancing from objective world and moving toward western art, gets closer to realization. Attitudes toward western art were so strong that after Sani'ol Molk's returning from west and king's attitude for Westernization process, for many years realization was dominant on Iranian painting and therefore, had some effects on carpeting industry. Despite the effect of western art and thought in spread of illustration paintings in Iran, they had only internal markets and foreigners didn't show any desires for them (Tanavoli, 1989: 11).

Focus on human, as the main topic, has transpired in Qajar arts in pictorial carpets. It is a phenomenon which following influencing from European art forms and contents and dominating humanist culture and thought, emerged in Iranian art. Regarding its both structure and content, the human figure is among main elements of Iranian painting. "Thus, human figure in Qajar art lost its main position, which in previous eras stood on educations of Iranian mysticism and it descended to a mere objective-decorative art, which served as a superficial representation of a model. Human figure impresses other painting elements in the art of the era" (Naghani, 2007: 86). Court Iconography⁵, as the clearest sample of human picture emergence in the art of Qajar era, is driven from the point that, in this era, art generally was dominated by King power and served to court family and high class people, and hereby they tried to boast their elegance and glory. Therefore, iconography was proposed as the main subject of the paintings of era, and caused Qajar paintings to be called Court Iconographies,

⁴ Westernization: it is an expression to describe incomplete modeling from European painting by some ancient Iranian and Indian painters. They used to different techniques and subjects and figures used in European paintings (Pakbaz, 1999: 371).

⁵ An expression to describe an Iranian painting school, which was created as a result of Westernization experiences. In this school, human figure representation was important, without any simulations. People were depicted as samples and contractively. The target was to objectify the grandness, modesty, excellence and beauty in human figures (Pakbaz, 1999: 147).

regarding their court function. In this regard, the artist of this era in various art fields, from one hand obeys the orders of king of the time and satisfies kings' selfish desires and purposes, and from the other hand puts the humane dominance and excellence on the nature, which is the result of humanist thoughts.

It would definitely be said that, Qajar art has taken most of its effect from photography. This caused the artist of the era, to gain the king's support and appreciation, begin a strong compete with the photography, and unwillingly trample down the aesthetic values of Iranian art (Naghani, 2009: 22).

At this era, with the emergence of printing and photography industries, majority of pictorial carpets were also affected by photography. They, from the early days of photography in Iran, had been autonomously created. They are about 80 years old. However, they began in middle of 19th century and the early days of Naser-Edin Shah reign and they ended in middle of Reza Shah and beginning of Second World War (Tanavoli, 2006: 47).

Pic A: Naser-Edin Shah Qajar
(Tanavoli, 2006: 43).



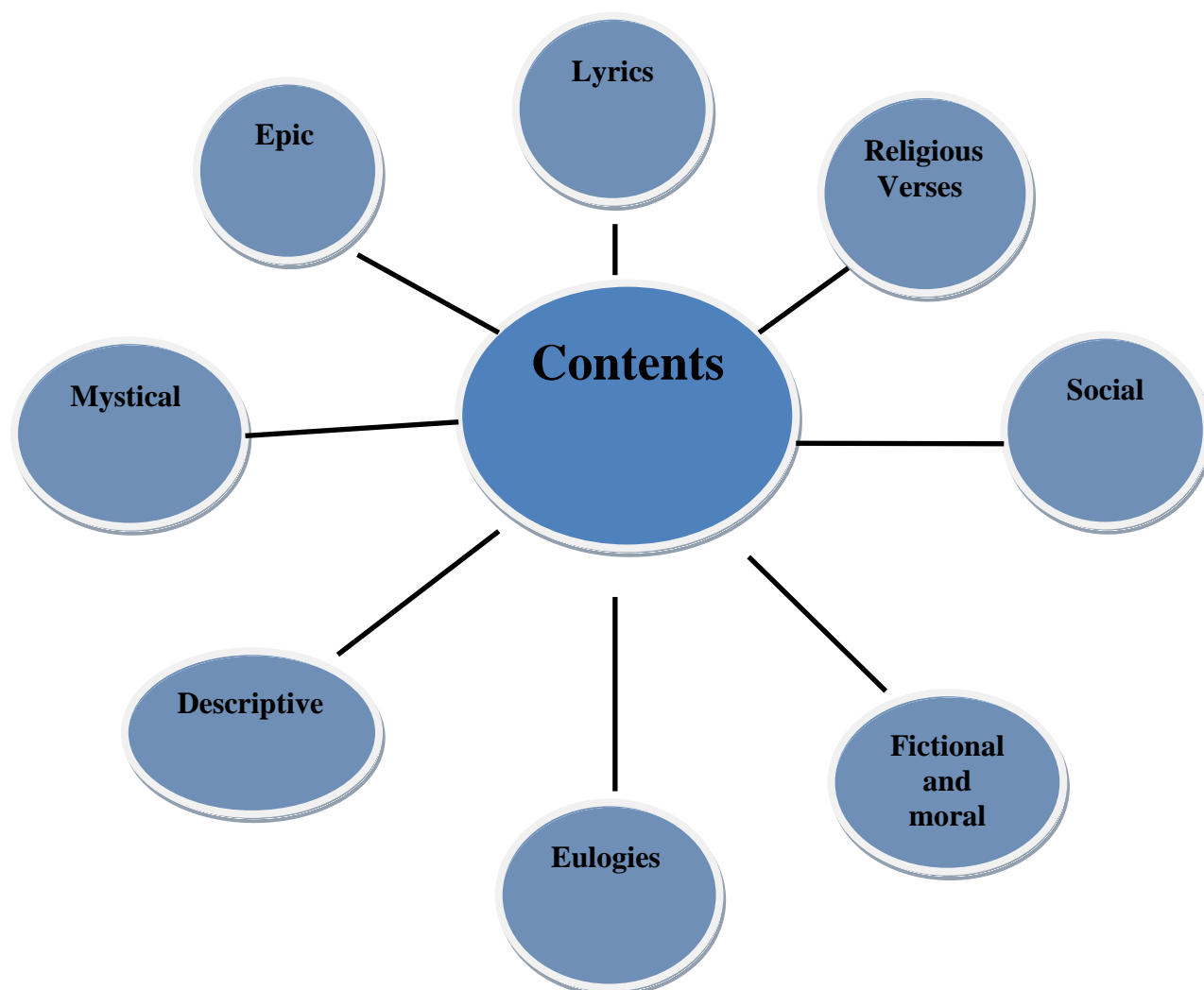
Pic B: Pictorial carpet of Naser-Edin Shah, Malayer (Tanavoli, 2006: 41).

It was a little after invention of cameras in Europe that a camera and with accessories was sent to Iranian Shah. Undoubtedly, Naser-Edin Shah's attention to photography was playing a great role on its development. He had a passion for photography and was a good motivator for photographers. Photos taken from him, by him or others, are as much that you think he was taking photos from himself in all his life periods. These photos were often kept in royal albums and some of official photographers were copied and sent to capital offices or states' centers. Thus, their copy or reproduction was not an easy job, especially in distant areas. So the easiest way was to project them on carpets. Therefore, the first pictorial carpets taken from Shah's photos were woven in small town and distant villages (Tanavoli, 2006: 43). Their circulation was so that they were mostly categorized under a group called "Kingship figures" (Tanavoli, 1989: 14).

Pictorial contents of carpets

After investigations and studies, it seems necessary to classify carpets based on contents. This classification is for studying and adjusting inscription texts with woven subjects in carpets, which is one of the main purposes here.

Based on their content, these scripts could be classified in 8 groups:



1. Lyrical contents

Among pictorial carpet instances studied, there are plenty of song contents. These carpets include lyrics and poems from grand poets like Hafiz, Saadi etc. For example, in the Picture 1; it illustrates the hunting ground of Bahram Gur, one of famous stories in Seven Beauties (also called Bahram Nama) by Nizami Ganjavi. Lyrical literature means pleasing songs and lyrics and it is a piece of literary text, in prose or poetry, which explains personal emotions and feelings of the poet. Lyrical literature is as fiction, elegy, hymn, complain or woes and they are in form of odes, Masnavi, quatrain, and ballades. Persian literature includes various lyrical poems like Veys and Ramin, Khosrow and Shirin, and Leyla and Majnun. Their main topic is expressing moods, emotions regarding joining, and parting.



Pic 1. Bahram Gur Haunting
Ground
Weaving Date: Late 18th century
Weaving place: Kashan
Keeping place: Iranian Carpet
Museum
Size: 127*204
Design: Pictorial
Source: Dadgar, 2001: 46



Pic 2. Khosrow and Shirin,
Pictorial
Weaving Date: Late 20th century
Weaving place: Kashan
Size: 147*254
Design: Pictorial
Source: Anton, 1996: 189

2. Epic contents

Shahnameh is one of the biggest and most outstanding epics of the world. This master piece includes a mythical and legendary content and Iranian history since Iranian conquer by the Arabians in 7th century. Epic is a series of athletic and martial stories. Epics are mostly in verse. It is a kind of descriptive text, which concerns athletic deeds, honors and personal or national grandness. Various stories of Shahnameh are depicted in some of pictorial carpets. Picture 4 is for a carpet with frame-frame design, in which each frame depicts one of Shahnameh stories.



Pic 3. Shahnameh Stories
Weaving Date: 1876
Weaving place: Kashan
Keeping place: Iranian Carpet
Museum
Size: 351*261
Design: Pictorial
Source: anonymous, 1982: 335



Pic 4. Shahnameh Stories
Weaving Date: 1920
Weaving place: Tabriz
Keeping place: Iranian Carpet
Museum
Size: 245*357
Design: Pictorial
Source: Bassam, 2003, v2: 33

3. Mystical contents

Shrine reading, Shabihkhani, and passion reading are some of religious ceremonies, which were popular in Qajar era (Shamim, 1991: 373). Therefore, Qajar society looks like a religious one. In that time, the society was so integrated with religious rites and educations that carpets were mixed with culture and believes and their influence more than anytime and projected such contents. In some pictorial carpets, you can find pictures of Sufi and dervish characters. In margin of such carpets or in context, there are lines of Sufism or mysticism. Among other religious topics in carpets, are Quran stories and some contents reminded in Islamic resources such as Adam and Eve story, Soleyman, the Prophet's Arbitration, and sacrifice of Ismail by Ibrahim AS.



Pic 5. Nour Alishah and
Moshtagh Alishah
Weaving Date: 1843
Weaving place: Kashan
Size: 151*105
Design: Pictorial
Source: Tanavoli, 1989: 243



Pic 6. Ismail sacrifice by Ibrahim
AS.
Weaving Date: 19th century
Size: 129*209
Design: Pictorial/ Animal
included
Source: Sakhai, 2008: 125

4. Descriptive (descriptions of spring nature, carpet, introducing places and people)

These samples include some references to spring, flowers, nightingales, grass, gardens, and rosaries that while describing spring nature made a happy, cheerful, and spiritual atmosphere. Among descriptive contents, there are some poems on the beauty of carpets. These carpet

poems are simulated to Heaven Gardens, Paradise, a fall-less spring or a rosary with no color or smell. In some other descriptive scripts, there are some introductions about people and places in the design of carpet. These kinds of scripts, regarding their content, were unprecedented before Qajar area. There are some carpets depicted with geographical maps, ancient places, and Iranian and world celebrities. In celebrities' carpets, majority of historical, political, religious, and literary figures are briefly depicted and their names are woven on the margin of carpet through numerations. One function of Iranian carpets, especially in Qajar area, was using carpet as context to illustrate people and lords.



Pic 7. Celebrities
Weaving Date: early 20th century
Weaving place: Ravar, Kerman
Size: 243*147
Design: celebrities
Source: Sakhai, 2008: 169



Pic 8. Four Seasons
Weaving Date: 19th century
Weaving place: Tabriz
Size: 225*316
Design: Pictorial
Source: anonymous, 1982: 182

5. Eulogies

Contents of eulogy and praising governors in form of carpets are visible in this area. These carpets, which were woven as an offering or gift for the king or states' governors, are among exquisite carpets of each area. For example, in picture 9 there is an image of ancient figures adapted from Persepolis and in eulogy and praise of governing king there are some verses on the margin. In addition, in picture 10 in margin inscriptions, in addition to the names

Acheamenian kings, there are some verses on description, explanation, and praise of their authority.



Pic 9. Pictorial
Weaving Date: 1887
Weaving place: Kerman
Keeping place: Iranian Carpet
Museum
Size: 276*205
Design: Pictorial
Source: anonymous, 1982: 437



Pic 10. Persepolis
Weaving Date: 20th century
Weaving place: Kashan
Size: 201*143
Design: Pictorial
Source: Sakhai, 2008: 122

6. *Fictional, Moral*

Fictional and moral topics are adapted from Shahnameh Ferdosi and Khamsa by Nizami, make another group of Qajar carpets, which their presence is more in pictorial designs. Pic 11 is of a pictorial carpet containing an illustration of Joseph the prophet's story and on the margin has some verses related to the story.



Pic 11. Story of Joseph, the prophet
Weaving Date: 20th century
Weaving place: Ravar, Kerman
Size: 228*104
Design: Pictorial
Source: Sakhai, 2008: 154



Pic 12. Story of Bahram and the Shepherd
Weaving Date: late 19th century
Weaving place: Kashan
Size: 151*225
Design: Pictorial
Source: Sakhai, 2008: 123

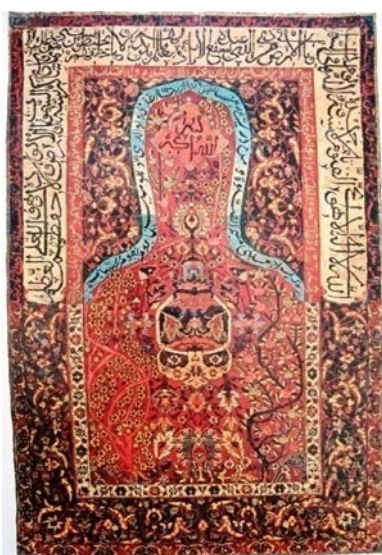
7. Social Content

Some carpets are woven according to social relations. In late Qajar era, due to some social changes, you can find their projections on some carpets. Bahram Gur facing with a shepherd whose has hanged his dog, from Seven Beauties by Nizami, is among topics, which is

attractive and catching. Picture 12 does not have an amusing or entertaining content, but it is influenced by the political thought of the area and has an intensely political and social content. The theme of this story is about important issues of ministry in a political kingdom system. Nizami has adapted this part of Bahram's story from the most important political text of that area, which was "Siyasat Nameh" (Letter of Politics) by Khaje Nizam-ul Molk Tousi. Generally, you can say that choosing this story has caused the enlargement of political components in various areas. Choosing a story for illustration, in which King is neither cheering up nor combatting, conquering, fighting but also getting advices from an old shepherd is really questionable. Thus, it does not have common aesthetical components. Old shepherd, Bahram Gur, pastoralism living conditions, a flock and a hanged dog, are all un-aesthetical and intangible elements. According to historical texts, this story at times was chosen to be illustrated, while there was a political mess in the country. It means, social and political illustrated layers in this carpet in Ahmad Shah era are related to the importance of illustrated figures of this story in Shah Tahmasb era, when the ministry was handed between the Ghezelbash tribe. This indicates that, in special political areas, in addition to considering arts, there was an attention for texts with strong political and social aspects. This was to induct some concepts and ideas (Ahani, Vandshoari, and Yaghoubzadeh, 2016: 68).

8. Religious verses

Altar or prayer carpets, due to their role for prayers, are often ornate with Arabic lines including religious verses and statements. However, weaving such carpets didn't last in Qajar era. Pictures 13 and 14 contain some altar designs and regarding venerability of such kind of carpets, they have some margin verses, which are according to their function.



Pic 13. Altar
Weaving Date: 19th century
Weaving place: Kashan
Size: 204*103
Design: Altar
Source: Sakhai, 2008: 119



Pic 14. Altar
Weaving Date: 1880
Weaving place: possibly Mashhad
Keeping place: Imam Reza Museum
Size: 120*177
Design: Altar-Tree
Source: anonymous, 1982: 157

Conclusion

Pictorial carpets are those ones that refer to various historical, religious, fictional, and literary topics or describe a scene. These designs, mostly, have narrative aspect and explain a specific subject. Emergence of such carpets in Qajar era might be related to different cultural and artistry factors like influencing from west and having an attitude for Realism in art, Humanism, and emergence of photography and printing. The balance between lines and figures, and powerful inscriptions, in accordance with paintings caused a boom and a spread in applying the combination of lines and figures in various artistry fields, which in pictorial carpeting of Qajar era is visible in form of inscriptions related to the given picture. According to the studies, to investigate and adjust the inscriptions with woven topics in these types of carpets, their lines and figures are categorized, regarding their contents, in 8 groups: lyrics, epic, mystical, descriptive, eulogy, narratives and moral, social, and religious.

Finally, after studies and investigations, and as a conclusion we can refer to the importance of inscription in pictorial carpets. These inscriptions, even inconsiderably, are as an evidence for the identity of the carpet. Qajar era is an area in which contains many inscriptions in carpets. In some remaining, there are some information indicating the name of workshop, designer, etc. or in some examples, there are some woven poems and Quran verses. After studies of this research, figurative lines contain some valuable information about the carpet, which seem valuable for identifying some carpets. Specific poems and text woven in a carpet, are trying to indicate a specific meaning and concept, which has the value to study. According to this study, it must be indicated that, also in recent area to identify some carpets, like entitling them to a specific city, workshop, design etc. or to transfer concepts and topics in carpets well, it is better to use more inscriptions.

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