

INFORMATIVE CODE OF AZERBAIJANI CARPET AND ITS ORNAMENT-SYMBOL

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Summary

Carpet weaving is one of the most ancient types of arts and crafts. The carpet is a key symbolic object of the human creation. It is all about its history of kind, laws of life and the Universe. It has an encrypted language and is very complex. Most of the iconographic symbols are a reflection of the reality of the ancient cults and worldviews. The symbolic ornaments in the carpets represent genetic memory, unfading creativity, and is a national treasure. An Azerbaijani carpet is, even for a dedicated person, a kissable book about the structure of the universe and carries deep knowledge in an encoded form. As you know, artistic creativity is symbolic in nature and abounds with images, metaphors and a whole range of artistic and expressive means that cause the viewer to intuitively perceive, unravel the author's intention, empathize, that is, a huge spiritual work to achieve.

Key words: memory, carpet, symbol, Universe, culture, ancient, complex, cult.

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1. Introduction

Since time immemorial, people have sought a universal language to express the connections between the phenomena in the mysterious world that surrounds them. These searches led to the discovery of generalised images and symbols, the latter being the predominant method by which mankind pursued its goal of transferring its accumulated experience to future generations. Following its appearance, the symbol occupied a special place in culture, enveloping and permeating literally every aspect of life including Azerbaijani carpet, which it's a complete book of the structure of the universe, carrying deep knowledge in encoded form. As we know, artistic creativity is a symbolic activity, replete with images, metaphors and myriad artistic and expressive methods of evoking the spectators' intuitive and subjective perception. It is a huge spiritual undertaking to understand the artist's mission. Due to their skill, the creator is always able to add their contribution to the symbolic space.

Methodology: The analysis of the informational code of the ornament-symbol of the Azerbaijani carpet as a result of undergoing researching sources of the subject, as well as by summarizing controversies and comparatives.

2. Main part

Carpet-weaving ranks amongst the oldest forms of decorative and applied arts in Azerbaijan, its extensive history being proven by archaeological discoveries across the country. For many centuries, the Azerbaijani carpet has been an ancient 'tablet', bringing together centuries of cultural information in its ornaments: it constitutes the world of symbols, the extension of ancient civilisations and the historical memory of the people.

Here is a brief interpretation of the symbols and signs that decorated Azerbaijani carpets. These symbols and signs repeated the main stages in the development of mankind, as indicated amongst the cults and religions of various nations. It is also obligatory to acknowledge the role of the Silk Road, along which the various cultures met and were mixed, being acknowledged as the “evolutionary way of development”, where the spiritual culture of various peoples was digested and various new systems and concepts were established. The Silk Road connected Azerbaijan with the ancient centres of civilisation – namely Greece, India, and China. The Azerbaijani carpets exported to Europe played an integral role in disseminating the ancient symbols and signs. They vibrantly interpreted the deep meaning of those symbols originating in the people’s genetic memory, becoming a tool of expression for original aesthetic tastes.

The carpet can concentrate spatial energies and create a protective field, which can serve humans over a long period, providing good luck and prosperity through its magical functions. The core of the magical information is found around the centre of the carpet, which is where the key symbols representing the world are concentrated. The edging is designed to provide protection against any type of negative force and the destruction of the world order that is in the centre of the carpet. The sacral feature of the carpet is its meaningful presence across all spheres of human life. It is always near a person and plays an integral role in happy, tragic and denominational days. There are also carpets made for such events as children’s birthdays, dowries, marriage days, mosque use and funeral rites.

Northern-style Azerbaijani carpets comprise strict symmetrical compositions with a clear set of geometric shapes. There are rhombus, squares, crosses, swastikas, zigzags and ‘s-similar’ elements. The infinite variety of these elements and their multiple transformations are as inexhaustible as their content and symbols. It seems that these symbols relate to the celestial bodies and their uniquely magical characteristics (*Brend, 2007, 25*).

The Azerbaijan people worshipped the sun throughout the ancient historical period. The ‘gel’ central carpet motif comprised the shape of a square or diamond medallion meaning ‘lake’ or ‘pond’, where the moon meant ‘lake of heaven’ in the ancient Turkic language. The moon combined a circle (full moon) or sickle (crescent) shape, being a symbol of purity and fertility. Furthermore, the geometric patterns on Azerbaijani carpets reflect the iconography of national history. The meaning of ornamental inscriptions is somewhat secret, existing in the history of the East. Each pattern created by them is a mystery, a kind of cipher, hidden not only in the symbols, but in the rhythm and color, in addition to the ornaments, where ancient writing is present. The letter ‘L’ is the wriggling snake, whereas the letter ‘Sh’ or ‘S’ is signified by a tooth or by narrow comb teeth (*Denny, 1994, p. 44*).

The complex designs of the ornaments in national carpets is recognizable. Due to the vibrant intertwined geometrical motifs, their composition maintains the worldview of the many generations inhabiting the land of ancient Azerbaijan.

These ornaments were created under the influence of universal concepts, beliefs in various deities and heavenly forces; and different religions and worldviews. They symbolise the heraldic signs (damga) of families, races, and tribes (*Jones, 2016, p. 188*). Geometric forms include a crocheted triangle; square; rhombus; octagonal stars; circles; swastikas; straight, broken and crossing lines; and meandering ‘S-shaped’ spirals (*O’kane, 2007, p. 96*).

This entire ancient alphabet is captured with calligraphic grace on Azerbaijani carpets (*Wilson, 2012, pp. 14-15*) ancient swastikas are found on the carpets of the Guba, Ghazakh and Karabakh schools; octagonal stars are on the carpets of the Baku, Gazakh, Guba, and Karabakh schools; triangles are on the carpets of the Shirvan and Guban schools; ‘S-shaped’ spirals are on the carpets of the Guban, Baku, Gazakh, Shirvan and Karabakh schools. The ornamental

rhombus, triangles, and crocheted squares are used by the Shirvan and Gazakh masters; whereas crossed lines are used by the Guba and Karabakh masters; stripes and meanders are used on the carpet edges sewn by the masters in all these schools.

The power of the traditional carpet, like the mandala, is concentrated in the central point, from which the waves of life radiate. Being in deep contemplation, a person seems to pull out all negative notions through the centre. Following that, the flow of light emanates from this point, filling the centre and the space around it. In a manner akin to the mandala, carpets harmonise the space and purify the energy. They provide a kind of flow for spiral energy that recovers the harmony of space, and hence the masters created prayer rugs. When people pray Namaz with a pure heart, surmounting everyday negativity, they involuntarily become an intermediary (conductor, mediator) for the magnum force on Earth that can only be heard in one's own heart.

Research indicates that the composition of Azerbaijani carpets, as with mythological systems for all centres of world civilisation, are determined by traditional cosmological concepts. Reflecting the structure of the world, this composition represents the model of the Universe space, the centre of which is the Divine Entity. The decorative art of many nations has similar compositional principles, all of which relate to ancient cults and religions. One of the predominant nations is Azerbaijan and the symbolic language of ornaments manifested itself on the carpets that reflect the unity of heaven and earth. The unity of space is the main principle of its destination, as it evokes celestial harmony in its ornaments. The symbols of carpet ornaments are genetic memory, creativity, and national heritage. The archaic nature of carpet composition is associated with the preliterate period of history "when certain signs (elementary descriptive) were the mnemonic programmes of texts and storyline stored in the nonverbal memory of the society" (*Lotman, 1087, p. 11*). The archaic feature of the ornament comprises its semantic and structural independence. Consequently (*Racinet & Dupont-Auberville, 2018, p. 17*), the Azerbaijani carpet appears as a complex device, as a kind of code, and an information generator. These symbols were also emblazoned on other types of decorative and applied arts, such as national clothing, also operating as a source of information about the history of nation. Most iconographic characters are a reflection of the ancient cults and worldview. They are expressed by such geometric figures as the circle, square, triangle and octagon. These constitute the most consistent elements of decorative and applied art that have retained their characteristic features for many thousands of years.

It is important to note one very important detail: the personification of evil forces and negative energy is never found on Azerbaijani carpets.

Color is the most important symbolic aspect of the Azerbaijani carpet (*Gage, 2012, p. 25*). The carpet masters normally used natural plant and animal dyes, produced from such sources as licorice root, oak bark, nettle, 'Naz-gul' flowers, plant roots, bark, leaves and fruit. For example, yellow and yellowish colors were made from yellow flowers and fig leaves, the faded leaves of mulberries, straw, bark, shoots and the flowers of the wild apple tree. They are also made from ginger and safran, albeit rarely, due to expense. Red and all its shades were obtained from the roots of rose madder and cochineal. By adding various ingredients, yellow-red or dark purple tones were obtained. Dark blue or blue, together with purple, were produced from natural indigo. To obtain a pure white color, white stone was added to boiled white yarn. In addition, black was obtained from the green shell of a young walnut, the bark of the walnut tree, and oak. Various shades of the main colors were taken into consideration. Pea green and cream were sourced from onions and apple peel, and oak color synthesised from the nutshell. Red provided protection from evil and operated as a symbol of fire as, according to Zoroastrianism, it signified sacred purification. Since ancient times, Azerbaijanis have colored parts of their body with red, and this traditional rite has been preserved to this day. During the

holidays, women colored their hair, hands and feet with henna, which was also used to decorate the hands and feet of the bride with sacral signs.

Furthermore, the bride also wore a red cloth. This initially related to the protective function of red, being directed against evil spirits, and later against the evil eye. The magical features of red were widely used in traditional medicine, as patients were often prescribed red clothes or placed red cloth on the afflicted part of the body. The umbilical cord of a newborn baby was tied with the red thread. A red carpet cover was hung in the home if someone was sick, and red was widely used during mourning ceremonies, with the body of the deceased being covered with red fabric to protect them from evil forces before entering their new eternal life. It is interesting to find the oldest burials of our distant ancestors who created the colorful basis of the modern carpet and learn about their perceptions regarding the semantic meaning of red. Furthermore, red dye was also used to paint the dead corpse during the Bronze Age, becoming a ritual rite for ancient people.¹ Red symbolised heavenly fire, the sun that all ancient peoples revered. In addition to the fire-sun, various geometrical forms, squares, triangles, circles, and octagons were carved on ceramic vessels, bronze belts and other objects found in burials, where they operated as a protector. In addition to the fire-sun, various geometrical forms, squares, triangles, circles, and octagons were carved on ceramic vessels, bronze belts and other objects found in burials, where they operated as a protector. They are all elements of the mandala and, over the centuries, were a protector of the Turkic peoples against evil spirits, their color being scarlet red. The magic circles used by the magicians of the Middle Ages were a kind of labyrinth, being a symbol for searching and finding the solution, operating as a guide towards good and positive energy. This contains the symbol of the female 'yin' and that of the male 'yang', combining the symbols of the material and spiritual, physical and mental, and earthly and heavenly.

The most valuable archaeological site in Azerbaijan is Gobustan, which comprises more than 2000 petroglyphs, all of which are imbued with symbolic meanings. The naive art of these ancient people managed to explain the world via the geometric signs and symbols that had an inherent cult and magical meaning. Later decorative ornaments developed an independent aesthetic value. It is important to note one very important detail: the personification of evil forces and negative energy is never found on Azerbaijani carpets. It is sometimes difficult to acknowledge how closely monotheism and polytheism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam relate to each other (*D`Avenues, 2016, pp. 7-18*).

The disappearance of the traces pertaining to a certain culture is not solely due to their supersedence and relegation to history. There is a conscious seizure of the 'disadvantageous evidence' of culture and deliberate misinterpretation of the facts of history for geopolitical ends, and this has happened throughout Azerbaijani history. The Azerbaijani nation did not escape the 'erasure', sometimes even suffering the 'withdrawal' of 'testimonies' that were uncomfortable for the conquerors of its ancient culture. Its centuries-old history was exterminated and falsely reconstructed in accordance with the prevailing policy of the dominating empires. However, the Azerbaijanis managed to preserve their material and spiritual wealth throughout the centuries. The ancient Media fell under the power of Achaemenids; Atropatena, following independence, was conquered by the Sassanid Empire in the early Middle Ages, and thereafter Arabic and Persian rule followed. During the modern period, the Russian Empire and Soviet Union had a major impact on local history and culture. Contemporary Azerbaijan must do much to reconstruct its history. Modern excavations are opening a new realm by which we can comprehend many hitherto hidden strata of history and culture.

The symbols and patterns that are preserved in the Azerbaijani decorative arts on carpets, fabrics and embroidery are the dragon, snake, lion, lotus, salamander, winged dog and sacred

mountain. There are echoes of the ancient culture of the Azerbaijani people who practiced Zoroastrianism, one of the oldest religions in the world that considered the Universe as alive and intelligent, where stubborn humanity is only part of this single organism. Humanity is blessed with free will and is even enfranchised to oppose the will of the gods, but in the event of a fatal mistake, life itself corrects them and assists with making the correct decision, because there is no progress without freedom and having the rights to error.

According to Zoroastrianism, God himself stops evil, and subsequent religions appropriated, for example, the eyes of Ahura Mazda (Eyes of Allah) and much more. Azerbaijani people continue to honour the resting places of the deceased and the arrival of spring, known as Novruz Bayram. The meaning of being in the harmonic connection of the mind comprises freedom, will and the love of peace. Perhaps the features of the future culture of humanity, based on one of the first religions of the saints of Thursdays in the 21st century, known as the Era of Aquarius, is hidden behind these principles. Art is the 'abbreviated universe' and its artistic world reflects the prevailing influences of the time. The accumulated elements in the decorative and applied arts, including Azerbaijani carpets, are processed in accordance with the internal artistic logic that is conditioned by the general laws of social development. This traces the deep factors that prepared and formulated Azerbaijani culture, which was impacted by many different cultures, forming part of various empires over a long period in its history.

The history and geography of the country are the basis of these components. Azerbaijan (the Gate of Asia) is a 'migration corridor', due to its geographical location. Entire peoples and civilisations passed through this corridor, and this resulted in appropriation and the relationships contributed to the cultural achievements of its civilised neighbours. There was a synthesis of the best from the dominant culture with that of those nations who were subjugated by the conquerors.

3. Conclusion

Symbolic representations on the land of Azerbaijan arose during a very early historical period. The signs and symbols inscribed on the weapons found in Gobustan bear testament to this statement. This symbolic representation was also reflected in the ancient art of the carpet that contains some elements of the mandala, such as the circle, triangle, square and octagon. The mandala and its inherent connection to the patterns and ornaments of Azerbaijani carpets is the voice of our ancestors that has echoed since the most ancient period of history. By listening to this voice, one can comprehend the cultural continuity of those nations who are able to reasonably coexist in this imperfect world.

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