



An Analytic Reading of Hunting Group Motifs in the Safavid Carpet with an Emphasis on Value Systems

(Case Study: Hunting Ground Carpet preserved in Miho Museum, Kyoto)

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Abstract

With the rise of the Safavids, carpet weaving art attained an unparalleled prosperity. The motifs in these carpets that took privilege of a wide range of the paintings, demonstrate ideological, religious, social evolutions and also their creators' thinking. One of the important Persian carpet motifs is hunting group motifs including the hunting, hunting ground, and engaging that achieved an unrivaled glory in Safavid era. Social and religious themes within the religious value systems in the visual discourse of Safavid's hunting ground carpets are one of the most important foundations of the formation of these motifs. The current research mainly attempts to find answers to the questions that: what would be the relation between hunting group motifs and the value systems of Safavid society? In what spectra the related value systems have been placed, and to what extent they have played roles in semantic evolution of the hunting ground motifs? Therefore, within the framework of the current research's objectives, based on the documents and manuscripts dating back to Safavid era, an analysis of the values systems of hunting ground motifs in the relevant era is first presented, and then the hunting motifs are categorized on the basis of value systems. The present research seeks to examine the engaging motifs using a semantic-semiotic approach in one of the relevant scenes in Safavid carpet. One of the research findings is that, in formation of artistic discourse including carpet, the presence of thinking and social contexts is irrefutable. Thus, it would be possible to read and interpret semiotic systems in a discursive trend to be able to extend the semantic aspect of the motifs and value-based spectra such as religion, moral, ideological and ritual values can also contribute to the fruition of hunting ground motifs.

Keywords: Semiology; Discourse; Value Systems; Safavid Carpet; Hunting Ground and Engaging Motifs.

Introduction

Iranian art and culture throughout history have always been known for the creation of a heritage that is rooted in beliefs, customs and rituals from one hand, and emanate from pure thought and endeavors of its creators on the other hand. One of the most ancient Iranian cultural heritage is carpet with a background as ancient as the mountains

of Altai, and as a document of Persian culture and art.

Concurrent with the beginning of the reign of the Safavid dynasty, as the kings were art lovers and art patrons, carpet weaving industry was flourished, and royal carpet weaving workshops revitalized in Isfahan, Kashan, Joshaghan, Herat, Tabriz, and Kerman to meet the needs of the court to



luxurious carpets. The workshops had a profound impact on the evolution of the tradition of Iranian carpet weaving workshops to the modern style. Most of the motifs woven on Safavid glorious carpets were created by the painters of that time. The designs are often an innovative mix of geometric, herbal, and animal motifs along with human figures that were associative of paradise gardens, and all of the motifs eventually led to the establishment of design and motif patterns in the Safavid carpet.

Hunting ground motifs as one of the most widely used figures in Safavid carpet are the result of the perpetuation of the old tradition of Iranian imagery that has been considered by artists and painters as a theme pattern since Mithraism era to the modern times. Hunting design and motif in Safavid era is the continuation of the representation through Persian miniature in Timurid and Safavid eras. Many experts believe that the remarkable examples of these themes were designed in the carpets by the great artisans such as Sultan Mohammad painter¹. The current research does not seek to explore the historical-mythical foundations of hunting motif in Safavid carpet, rather it aims to open a new window for more dynamic reading of these valuable historical monuments. In addition to text, texture, artist and audience find importance. In this type of reading, the meaning built upon four above factors is fluid and discursive.

The arts in every era represent social and cultural developments of that period. Thus, carpet design and motifs can portray some cultural and social aspects of each period. What preoccupies the mind in this regard is Safavid artists' particular attention to hunting motif or hunting ground design. Hunting and

hunting ground, and engaging represent a value system, and when it becomes a dynamic repeating pattern in the art of the Safavid carpet, then it represents a basic concept. The basic concept undoubtedly will be based on value systems, i.e. the concept itself shows the value and also plays parts in the formation or strengthening of value systems underlying the society. These systems are readable and traceable in the form of engaging and hunting motifs. After the problem statement in the research and also determine the research approach in this area, it is necessary to consider the questions raised in this article: 1) what is the relationship between hunting motifs and value systems governing Safavid society? 2) How would be possible to categorize and specify the related value systems, and how they can contribute to the semantic transformation of hunting motifs?

Using a different approach, the current research seeks to establish a link between such ancient archetype and sociocultural context in Safavid era in order to achieve a new range of interpretative meanings through the motifs and designs. In the discursive approach in this study, it is believed that every work of art is a door that brings the audience to a dynamic and fluid discourse, the discourse that audience can also participate in the formation of meaning in it.

1-Research Background

Persian carpet in the Safavid era was one of the genuine cultural achievements of Iran, and even the representative of Persian art and civilization in European countries, in a way that a considerable part of the carpet weaving masterpieces of this period such as Sanguszko, polonaise or Polish carpets, Salting



carpets are preserved in abroad and in major museums around the world. Therefore, an opportunity has been provided for researchers and experts practicing in the area of Persian carpet to carry out highly valuable research in Iran and outside Iran, on Persian carpet in different historical periods, particularly during the Safavid era. From this perspective, and to do a targeted research, the research background of the current research is outlined as follows.

The background relevant to hunting group motifs includes the studies that identify and classify hunting, hunting ground, and Gereft-o Gir motifs with historical and mythological approaches. Sabahi (2014) in an article entitled "A Royal Hunting" explores the history of hunting motifs in Iranian art and the carpet preserved in Poldi Pezzoli Museum of Milan. Afrough (2010) in his book "Symbols and Semiotics of Persian Carpet" refers to the mythical and symbolic foundations of the hunting motifs in Iranian carpet. Most of the studies regard the origin of hunting motifs in Mithraism. One good example is an article entitled "The evolution and development of hunting theme in Persian Art" by Ahmadi Payam (2009).

Shirazi and Keshavarz (2011) in their article examined the hunting motifs designed by Mohammed Mosavar al-Maleki on the basis of the hunting ground carpets in Safavid period and categorized their different types. In addition, Taqavinejad (2008) in his article presents an analysis of the expression of Gereft-o Gir motifs in Safavid's carpet and different classes of such motifs. However, there are not considerable studies on the link between hunting and Gereft-o Gir motifs in Savaid's carpets with the socio-cultural context of this particular era. The

research background relevant to the examples of hunting in the carpets of Safavid era is categorized in the visual background of hunting in Iranian art.

2) Methodology

The current research is a developmental-oriented one in terms of objective, because it mainly attempts to develop discursive theory in the area of historical carpets. In terms of nature, the study is a qualitative research which utilizes analytic method of discursive semiotics. In addition, as one example of hunting group scenario is utilized in the study, it is a descriptive-analytic research.

3) Research Areas

Safavids were taken their name from the "Sheikh Safi al-Din Abu al-Fath Is'haq" known as Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili. As one of the leaders of the Safavid order (*Tariqa*), he lived in a monastery in Ardabil, and therefore Ardabil can be considered the origin of the Safavid dynasty. "Most resources (after Safavids' access to the throne) have composed different genealogies and have attributed the genealogy of this family to the seventh Shiite Imam, Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (AS)" (Navaei-Ghafari-fard, 2007: 33). "Since the Safavids acknowledged Shi'ism as the official religion of the country, relying on the above mentioned genealogy, they claimed the succession of the Twelfth Shiite Imam, [Imam](#) Mahdiⁱⁱ. More importantly, to further consolidate this idea, they attributed their roots to *Ahl al-Bayt* ⁱⁱⁱ (ibid, 34) which was considered a priority at that particular era. This Safavids' thinking that had some roots since the era prior to *Ismā'il* .in this sect to base Safavid's power on three pillars; firstly, theory of divine right of the kings of Persia, and this right was based on the belief that the kings take "Farr-e Izadi (divine charisma). This ancient theory which



dates back to the ancient pre-Islamic era was used with all its former glory, and re-emerged in a new form based on the idea that ruler is the shadow of the God on the earth. Secondly, Safavid kings claimed that they are representatives of Imam Mahdi on the earth. Thirdly, the Safavid rulers were ranked as "Perfect Masters" of the followers of the *Sufi Tariqa*, which are known by the name of Safavids" (Sivori 2008: 2). Chardin^{iv} insisted that most of Iranians, especially clergymen, believe that the government right is monopolized to the prophets, imams or their successors. Safavid era is an era in which growth and development of religious ideas and beliefs was very impressive in the whole period of Iranian history. In Safavid era, influenced by the kings' pre-occupations with religious considerations, development of religious centers and nourishment of religious scholars found an abundant prosperity. In Safavid era, in addition to the frequent opposition of pompous state and political systems, there happened to be some other conflicts in the field of religion and religious thinking between religious scholars and theosophists of religious schools.

Safavid era is the shining period of the revival of Persian carpet weaving and splendor of this beautiful art. The valuable remaining examples of Persian carpets in famous museums throughout the world are the examples of the result of the royal weaving workshop at this time. The patronage of competent Safavid kings and their fervor interest in the carpet weaving profession led to the promotion of texture industry from a rural profession into one of the fine arts. Shah Abbas made important contributions to the development of this artistic profession. He ordered to establish workshops in the vicinity of his

royal palace between Chehel Sotoun to Maidan Shah in order to directly monitor the weavers' practice and to ensure quality and delicacy of weaving. The historical notes recorded by some travelers such as Tavernier^v, Chardin, Robert Shirley^{vi} are some documents to verify this claim (Yasaveli, 2001:3). During this time, cities such as Tehran, Isfahan, Kashan, Joshaghan, Tabriz, Mashhad and Herat were identified as the most important centers of carpet weaving.

4) Research concepts

4-1 Value in a social system

One of the key concepts in the realm of human understanding is personality. In fact, personality is those patterns and behaviors that remain relatively stable even with changes in mood and social behavior of human beings. The personality is a set of verifiable and even predictable features in a man, which can be achieved affected by culture and in dealing with society. What help us study, identify and categorize personality are social values, value preferences, and personal habits and behavior which play important roles in the dissemination and supply of different values. For example, a person who constantly strives to achieve power can be categorized in the class of "power-oriented" people, and the people who strive for money, respect, knowledge and effort can be divided in the same category as well. Values are facts that serve human needs. "Values" are preferred facts (Sane'i, 1968: 42). Accordingly, it should be noted that there is no distinction between these two categories (namely facts and values), and wisely historicism recognizes this distinction as destructive. In fact, the main cause to the occurrence of an event (action/facts) and the reasons for its occurrence (value) simultaneously work



together to transfer a historical narrative to the audience. Every historical action inevitably has a value, and as the narration of history is not only an epistemological category but also a historical action as well, thus it cannot escape value (Fayyaz Anoush, 2010: 107). The reasons for the occurrence of actions (values) can be varied in terms of the relevant circumstances and interpretations. "Action is the result of thinking of the individual and his definition of the circumstances, then define the circumstances is of critical significance in the formation of an action" (Yazdi, 2012: 15).

4-2 Binary oppositions pattern

From the perspective of structuralists, binary oppositions constitute the basis of human thinking. Binary oppositions show the contrast between the two poles: good versus the bad, the ugly versus beautiful, life versus death, life versus death, etc. In all these dichotomies, there is always one pole in on one side and another opposed to it. Of course, this theory was later challenged and criticized by some post-structuralists such as Jacques Derrida. However, binary oppositions exist constantly in the heart of the culture of various ethnic groups in the form of myths, traditions and cultural texts. In Iranian art and culture, either prior to Islam or in the Islamic period, these contrasts are clearly obvious as well. Ahura Mazda^{vii} and Ahriman^{viii} is a clear example of the conflict between good and evil in ancient Iranian culture, which could be seen again in later periods with Islamic flavor. Binary Opposition discourse in Iranian philosophical and cosmological beliefs is rooted in belief in duality doctrine in Zurvanism^{ix} (creator deity) who engendered [equal-but-opposite twins](#), [Ahura Mazda](#) and [Angra](#)

[Mainyu](#)). Paying attention to good and evil as two powerful forces affecting human life and the universe is undeniable in ideological structure of Mesopotamia, Elamites, Persian pre-Aryan and Aryan. "Good and evil becomes a dominant ideology in Iranian ideology and encompasses the whole world, and divides the universe into two parts Ahuraei (the divine) and Ahrimani (the evil). This feature, i.e. an extension of the concept of good and evil in whole of the material and spiritual realms is one of the main characteristics of Iranian worldview (Rezvanian, 2014: 125).

Man as a creature composed of the two forces (good- evil) bears some parts of Ahura Mazda and Ahriman in its existence. In Islamic periods, binary or bipolar oppositions were manifested in Persian literature. Some poets and scholars such as Saadi Shirazi founded the foundation of their philosophical views on the oppositions. Stone Age hunter deemed that he is the real owner of the object depicted by him, and by this depiction, he can govern its destiny. Also, he thought that the animal could actually feel the pain of being killed. According to such hunters, the representation of the image of the animal is a practical expectation that will happen sooner or later (Abed Doust & Kazempour, 2008:101). In the case of the artifacts discovered in Elam, there could be seen animals fleeing from humans or from lions. A valuable set of featured motifs dating back to Assyrian era has been left as well. Two examples are a lion dying on the ground while shot by arrows and spears, or a king is hunting a group of lions. These examples are indicative of a conflict between animals with each other, and animals and human, which were engraved on the prescriptions in later eras. The oppositions could be also

seen on the scenes related to the battle between king and lion, indicating the victory of sun over winter. Two cardinal points in the Zodiac (summer solstice

and winter solstice) indicate the serious presence of dual oppositions in Iranian thinking.



Fig. 1 A part of the hunting ground carpet preserved in Poldi Pezzoli in Milan, 10th century AH

As a result, according to these historical sources, the binary oppositions in hunting and Gereft-o Gir motifs have a long tradition in Persian (Iranian) culture and are associative of profound ideas and beliefs of their creators. In the Islamic era, such designs and motifs attracted the attention of artists, and new system of oppositions and values was created in combination with Iranian new beliefs. This trend continues his endless way to Safavid era, and becomes a theme for creating splendid works of Iranian artists in the realm of painting, and more seriously in Safavid carpets.

4-3 Designs and motifs hunting

At the beginning of this discussion, it is necessary to point out the differences between design and motif in order to

develop concepts through proper logical explanations. The design means an overall structure which forms composition principle. For instance, alter (*Mehrabi*) or *Lachak* or *Toranj* (Bergamot) is known as a design. Hunting ground design is as an overall structure and atmosphere that encompasses some elements such as hunting and hunter and also background elements such as mountains, trees and plants. The design is a totality in which some minor elements known as motifs are embedded. In other words, design is a system that its elements are called motif. Thus motifs are minor elements embedded in the design, and a link is established between them and the totality of design. Therefore, actors involved in a hunting such as hunted and hunter, and some background elements such as tree, mountain and plants each are recognized as motifs.

The hunting motif actors can be divided into two groups including human and animals which their combination can give rise to two states. In the first state, one party is man mostly as hunter and another party is animal mostly as prey. The motif resulting from this interaction is called hunting motif, and a place or space in where this interaction takes places is known as hunting ground. In the hunting motif, human figure strives to hunt some animals such as lion, deer, rabbits, etc. with tools like bow and arrow, and sword or spear. "In the ancient and original maps of hunting grounds, e.g. in Safavid hunting grounds, hunting scenes are portrayed in such a way that a king is engaged in hunting" (Afrough, 2010:138) (Fig. 1). In such scenes, king is present on the scene often with crown and signs specific to princes.



Alongside the king, there are other people who are engaged in hunting. Hunting ground motifs are portrayed often in the form of designs such as *Afshan*, *Toranjdard*, *Lachak Toranj*, and *Ghabi*. Accordingly, the hunting ground motifs can be divided into some forms including tree hunting grounds, *Toranjdard* hunting ground, *Ghabi* hunting ground, *Lachak Toranj* hunting ground, and *Sarasari* (widespread) hunting grounds.

In the second case, the actors include the prey, animal, bird or any other animal which in this case the shaped motif is called Gereft-o Gir. Usually in Gereft-o Gir motifs, one of actors strives to hunt or chase the beast, which both states are called Gereft-o Gir. In almost all of such motifs, a strong creature is hunter and the weak one is the prey (Fig. 2)

Animal motifs with their long history in the realm of different forms of art always refer to their symbolic ancient concepts. In this regard, Gereft-o Gir motifs are of special significance in varied artistic contexts and have been portrayed in their most beautiful form. In addition to symbolic aspects, these motifs refer to religious themes and also survival and life as well. " Gereft-o Gir motifs, as their name suggest are a symbol of war and power in order to maintain life and survival, and the victory of one over another" (Taqavinejad, 2008: 50).

In Gereft-o Gir scenes, animals or creatures embody different states and situations. In some cases, opposition takes place face to face, in another case it happens successively, and sometimes also it occurs from behind and the animal is beaten with a fork or teeth. In another case, the aggressive animal might be a bird which attacks the prey from above or a hunter is depicted rushing over the back of the prey and overcomes it. A unique example of Gereft-o Gir scenes is entanglement of a dragon and an animal such as lion or phoenix, which is an unmatched and beautiful portrait of Iranian mythical traditions.



Fig. 2: Gereft-o Gir Motif- A part of the carpet enriched by braid; the mid-tenth century AH

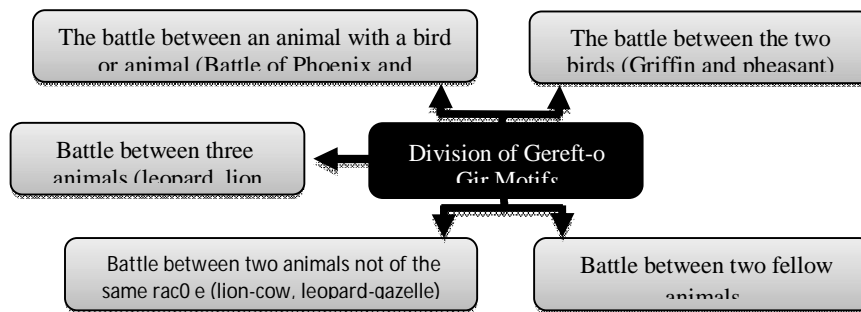


Fig. 3: Division of Gereft-o Gir motifs in Safavid era



From a semantic perspective, hunting motifs can be identified in the following five modes:

1-The expression of a real event: such as the portrayal of the royal hunting ground, indicating the interest of the Iranian kings to hunting as a royal pastime.

2-The expression of attempt to get the royal or divine splendor: in this state, the defeated animal was depicted as a symbol of splendor in semiotic system of Iranian culture.

3-Expressing an astronomical fact: in this case, usually some animals are used which are symbols of

the constellations or the zodiac, such as the motif of *Shir Gaav Shekan* in Persepolis as the astrological sign to seasonal changes.

4-The archetypical confrontation of good and evil: this traditional conflict is portrayed between good and evil, which because of the promise of the ultimate triumph of good energy in the universe the good is usually the dominant actor which defeats the bad force.

5-The expression of a social reality: this state is considered as the most important objective of the present article, and is added to the four states mentioned above which are usually cited in the normal interpretations carried out. In some of the hunting motifs, the hunting actors point to a social movement or cultural and social currents of thought which have been

metaphorically depicted in a symbolic language.

5) Design patterns and hunting group's motifs

5-1) History of hunting motif

The origins of the hunting motif in Iranian art could be sought in pre-Islamic art. The murals of Kouhdasht region in Lorestan province shows some scenes of hunting with bow and arrow and spear and some animals such as horse, deer and goat. Outside the current borders of present-day Iran, a wide range of such motifs can be seen as well, but perhaps the earliest emergence of the hunting motif in its present meaning is the hunting ground scene in Dora Erapus as an ancient area in Syria. "The murals in Kouhdasht dating back to the Parthian era are apparently the earliest Iranian artistic works which show the man on the horse and engaged in hunting and shooting" (Shirazi and Keshavarz, 2011: 75). This processing method was extensively flourished in the tradition of painting and imagery after the emergence of Islam in Iran.

5-2) The history of Gereft-o Gir motifs

Gereft-o Gir motifs generally symbolize war and the struggle to seize power for survival. The motifs that are among the hunting motifs have wide applications in various arts and are frequently repeated. These motifs often refer to scenes in which a battle has happened between two animals in front or on their backs.

"The history of these motifs in Iranian art dates back to millennia BC, in way that in Jiroft ancient civilization, we are witness of hunting motifs and the scenes of the battle between animals" (Tagavinejad, 2008:51)

In these motifs, the scenes of stcarpetgle between a snake, leopard and eagle could be seen in abundance. In the Achaemenid era, in eastern staircase of the Apadana Palace, it is possible to observe the theme of Gereft-o Gir in the form of a battle between lion and cow (Fig.4).



Fig.4: Battle of cow and lion; eastern staircase of the Apadana Palace (authors)

6) Value-based spectra underlying hunting group motifs

In this part of the research process, it is necessary to examine some of the most important value-based components of the hunting motifs in Safavid era. For this purpose, by identifying and exploring the value systems of the relevant discourse, based on the evidence in the historical, geographical and social records of Safavid era, a categorization of the values available in these instances is presented. Such meanings in value systems are not utterly absolute, and they can be evaluated, challenged and altered by some other practitioners such as scholars, critics and experts. In a general view, it is possible to categorize the value spectra underlying hunting group motifs or hunting ground schemes into the following forms.

- 1- Aesthetic values
- 2- Narrative-mythical values
- 3- Religious Values
- 4- Moral and Ethical Values.
- 5- Values based on the power of good against evil
- 6-Social values: this kind of value, certain kinds of social class distinctions could be seen that are made visible in the form of lower class against upper class:
 - 1- Weak actors or public class
 - 2- Powerful actors
- 7- The effort-based values to obtain a value

7) A review of the case study: Hunting Ground Carpet woven in Kerman (the late ninth century AH):

7-1) The study sample (Fig. 5)

The sample under study is an Iranian carpet dating back to the tenth century AD, which on the basis of its structure and pattern, the carpet has been attributed to Kerman as a prominent carpet weaving center of the time. The carpet's pile fabric is made of cotton, and its lint is made of fine wool dyed with perfectly herbal dyes. The original design of the carpet is hunting ground lachak toranj that is designed in a quarter form. The carpet structure is made of one main margin, two small lateral margins (internal and external locks), Lachak, Sarlachak, toranj, sar toranj, and frame.

Toranj in the carpet is a scalloped framed toranj that holds five frames, one in the center and four other frames symmetrically situated at the four corners of the central frame. The central frame has an engaging design, and in surrounding frames, we can see two winged configurations on two horizontal sides and two simple configurations on two vertical sides. Around these frames, bold floral arabesques can be seen in a symmetrical form and equivalent to the one quarter of the original design. The dominant color in toranj is red (jube red), in four surrounding frames is blue, and in the central frame is cream-colored. The carpet's lachak is the vagireh of one quarter of toranj, which is located at the corners in a reversed form. Its dominant color is copper color, and its design consists of three riders trying to hunt the three animals separately. The horses have distinct colors, and riders' outfit is also different. Each of the riders on these horses do hunting by different tools. The rider on the lachak looks back with a bow and arrow to throw arrows toward the prey. The rider beneath the lachak using a weapon like spears aims to hunt a wild animal that is probably feline. The third rider that is moving in the center and the left part of the lachak, using an animal lasso, has brought a deer to his captivity.



Fig.5: a part of Sangojco carpet preserved in Miho Museum, Kyoto, the late tenth century
(Pope, 2102: 282)

The carpet's context has Cathay branches and leaves that are filled with Shah Abbasi flowers, and the fighting scene between the two animals can be seen next to the flowers. The fight, so called engaging, can be seen from the highest point in the center of the carpet to the lowest point along the horizontal margin in few scenes. The first engaging scene shows two animals that one of which is a beast and attacks the prey's back. The attacking beast can be seen in dark brown/ocher colors and the prey has an earthy color. The second scene portrays again a wild beast on the back of an animal that is either a deer or goat. In this scene, hunter rushes on its prey by tooth and nail and can capture the prey. The animal's head is reversed back and trying to get rid of her hunter. In the bottom of the image, a predatory animal is located on Cathay stems in such a way that seems it lurks behind an animal.

However, it is unclear whether it is lurking to catch the running gazelle at the central part, or seeks to attain a part of the corpse of another prey under the control of another hunter. In addition to these scenes that are the most important events in the context of the carpet under study, some other hunter and hunted animals can be seen in the carpet that all are fleeing or have remained on an ambush.

The carpet margin is constituted of the three main internal and external locks (torreh, in Persian). The main margin consists of a vagireh. The vagireh is composed of a circular frame at the center and two half-frames on either side. Since there is not sufficient opportunity to examine all parts of this fine work, only the scenes in the carpet contexts are analyzed, and the margins as a complex system will be postponed to future investigations. The carpet under study (i.e. the discursive system at hand) is composed of several parts or components that each one can open a meaningful window to the audience's eyes. One scene happens at the carpet central tornaj, the second scene at the context, the third one in lachaks, and the final one at the margins.

7-2) Engaging scene in the central toranj

The central frame of the toranj in this exquisite carpet depicts the conflict and interweaving of the two creatures. The colors used for the two creature have intensified the clashes. Both animals are twisted into a spiral form, and attempting to tear apart each other with their teeth. Snake- and dragon-like form of these two animals can intensify the conflict and also emotional tensions, and because of the extreme proximity of the two actors, cognitive range is drastically reduced.(Fig.5) The peripheral space of these two conflicts that is covered with small decorative flowers and stems and a bright background has reduced the extent of emotional sense of the surrounding space. Both actors with equal power have engaged in a conflicting scene, and discursive atmosphere governing this part represents the dominance and power of both animals on the situation. The colors used



Fig.6: the central frame of the toranj with the scene of engaging between two dragons.



in this image are of extreme significance. On the one hand, the color contrasts between black and red helps to increase the ensuing pressures. On the other hand, the red color used in the figure of one of the actors has provided a context for more analysis. "Red" as a color with a short wavelength, aesthetically and psychologically, is an influential color that can represent fire. At the same time, the significant power observed in red color can be sign of warning and danger.

The placement of the color on the dragon, in terms of symbolic meaning, encompasses the whole range of meanings. Hence, considering this evidence, it is possible to regard the dragon a creature with powerful, devastating and fearful creature. Such power is representative of dragon motif and its unique color, evil forces, and the dark world of underground and death.

Thus, in this regard, the juxtaposition of the two elements (dragon, red color) has intensified emotional pressure in this part of toranj, and has led to a tension in the discourse. The tension that has arisen through the power of the dragon and red color can be associated with Ghezelbash armed forces. It could be inferred that the red color as a symbol of Ghezelbash forces in the Safavid period along with the black can indicate severe confrontation and conflict between this military and political force within the system with the king and the royal family. In Abbas Mirza era, Ghezelbash forces expedited the surrogacy of the king and delegated his little brother to the throne. This led to the King's suspicion of this powerful military force and led him to behead all of the forces' leaders in a few years, and to disperse all of the forces as well. Since both animals are the same species but are displayed in two different colors, it could be alleged that this military forces that were close to the royal family at the beginning of the Safavid reign and considered as vanguards in all of the state matters, were condemned by the king and doomed to annihilation. Thus, both were portrayed with the same figure and appearance. However, due to changes in attitudes and practices in relation to each other, they gradually distanced themselves from each other. This shift in the distance and stance can be construed of the color of the two dragon figures. Surrounding the toranj's central frame, bold floral arabesques can be seen that depict some red beasts and a black deer in two separate spaces (Fig.7).

Placement of the beast in an arabesque frame and their enclosure has reduced its power on discursive current, and has put the black deer in the arabesque space under complete security. The absence of decorative elements in such bold floral arabesques adds to its cognitive scope. Hence, space has become vacant of tension, and emotional pressure is reduced. The presence of two calm birds on the beast shows balance and stability in the discursive space. The action in the central frame that shows two animal actors fighting with each other, is revered in the bold arabesques surrounding the frame, and wild and tame animals have placed in a separate space in a state of calm, which indicates the stability following instability. Of course the deer looks back repeatedly, and as if he is not so much satisfied with the present situation, yet red



Fig.7: carpet's toranj with floral arabesque designs, and plant and animal motifs.



predator is fully enclosed in a separate space and fails to exit from the situation. Under this circumstance, as if discursive space is replete with an expectancy that has afflicted both deer and predator animal. In this case, both animals are expected to reach the "place of action". This expectancy happens in a place that is called also waiting place or Purgatory. Thus, if the red predator is assumed as Ghezelbash forces, despite they are suppressed by the king, but still they are waiting for an opportunity to take revenge on the king, even though they never find such opportunity. On the other hand, due to the king's ignorance of the complete suppression, he is still anxious of his own situation, and it is possible to interpret this part of the carpet as a kind of instability, and extend the semantic signification of the carpet's context through a meaning associated with social currents.

7-3) the context's engaging scenes

In the carpet's context, in addition to Cathay rotations and large and small flowers, the animals are involved in motion, fighting and combat. At the bottom, a heavy fighting between a beast and a Gazelle can be seen. Both animals tend to move to the bottom. The beast that is probably a lioness rushes over the back of the elusive animal. Here the peak of emotional pressure can be observed in the conflict between these two animals. The atmosphere underlying this discourse is a contractile space, but as passive animal (gazelle) is running and fleeing from hunting situation, it can be considered as an attempt to shift from a contractile-tension situation into an elusive one. The presence of an animal like fox in an expecting situation in this discourse ad behind a large flower that has provided the fox with security is indicative of instability in such discursive space. This is because even if the deer flee from the lioness, its security is also subject to danger due to the presence of the fox. These pressures and tensions can lead to the emergence of a sort of negative value system with features such as crisis, war and insecurity (Fig.8). In ancient times and ancient artistic traditions, lion, deer, goats, etc., often meant changing seasons and astrological signs. Lion is also a symbol of power, prosperity, abundance, the sun, etc. In a period of history when the scarpetgle broke out between the ethnic groups in Iran and Assyrians in Mesopotamia, lion as the purpose of hunting for the king of Assyria was inscribed on the monuments left form Nineveh and other places. In other words, the lion was the symbol of Persia because the lion lived in the Zagros Mountains.

Of course, all other religions were somehow dominated by the Safavid Shia, and the extent of activity for them had become so constricted. This issue led to the formation of two or more socio-religious classes in the community. An upper class who were followers of Shia and Iranian Shia rulers, and a lower class who were Sunni followers involved in secret affairs, and the third class composed of poorer people and marginal sects such as Noqtaviyan. Of course, there was so much conflict and strife between the classes. According to historical documents, Shah Abbas often demolished the main religious opponents. He even bore the title of Perfect Master institution, thus consolidated its position among Shia scholars. Hence, given what was states regarding the background of lion symbol in Iranian culture and its relation with the Shia, it is possible to liken the situation of lioness's rushing over the back of a deer to the status of the religions, dominant classes, and their supremacy over other ideological and



religious classes. Under this situation, the contrast between the two animals is neither symbolic confrontation between good and evil nor a symbolic coping to change the seasons, rather it is indicative of a social-ideological fight in the Safavid era. A confrontation in which one of the parties definitely dominated and subjugated another. Absolute good and evil does not make a sense in this confrontation, because what determines the good and evil is socio-cultural situation underlying the community, and more importantly, the dominant power. However, based on another interpretation, it could be said the relevant confrontation can symbolize the conflict between two powerful actors. In this confrontation, one party molested another one. The deer is "an object of value" that lioness as actor is in scarpetgle with it. In Safavid era, the government was in conflict with the Ottoman Empire in the West, and Uzbeks in the North East. In addition, Iranian fleet located in the Persian Gulf to battle Portugal put the country always at the threshold of crisis, insecurity and war. Under such chaotic circumstance, some performed evil actions to earn more property and share, thus the above-mentioned confrontation scene resulted from the carpet's discursive context could symbolize the insecure and unstable condition underlying the country. Given the different readings of this discourse, three different values can be inferred from it.

1-Since the Shia as a dominant ideology in the field of religious values can play parts in this action, the first value relevant to the motif can be "Shia".

2-As it was mentioned earlier, in spreading Shiism, the upper class or the same rulers played pivotal roles. Upper and lower classes can find meaning in the area of social values. Thus, such painting, despite the dominance of a value such as "power" had been able to promote religious value "Shiism".

3-Under this situation, the presence of a value has led to the realization of another value. The confrontation and conflict between the two actors namely lioness and deer could mean confrontation between Iran with the Ottoman Empire and Iran's eastern and western neighbors. This connotations will be further corroborated due to the expectancy and presence of another animal at a farther distance from this part of the discourse. In fact, fox is located farther than "the place of action" in a state of anxiety and ready for action and sees the clash ensued between the lioness and deer. Slightly higher, where the lioness and deer are fighting, another battle is taking place that can be the associative of the conflicts and wars between Iran and Ottoman since the beginning of the Safavid era to the beginning of the reign of Shah Abbas. Such conflict and confrontation can lead to the formation of another value in the discourse that is called "defense".

4-In the background or marginal part and inside the Cathay excursions, the distance between the periphery and sar toranj, another battle scene between the two animals can be seen. Both are imaginary creatures with fins and tails shaped like a dragon. In this scene, the dominant animal has caught the prey's foot and pulled to the teeth, and while standing completely on his body, has brutally killed it. In this state, while the captured beast has fallen on its back, looks back and is completely surrendered. Of course, perhaps, there is no persistence on fight and the defeated animal is surrendered not out of desperation but willingly. If this allegation would be true, it can be an affirmation of the symbolic aspect of this engaging scene. The conflicting space underlying this scene depicts a battle that is now coming to an end. Increased

emotional tension in this stage is intensified with the dying animal. And Cathay rotational lines are associative of a freedom, and contributes to the widening of cognitive scope. Whatever Cathay excursions become farther than the central point, the distance between the decorative flowers and motifs surrounding the scene becomes more prominent, hence emotional tension is increased. Both figures move from inside to the outside of the spiral lines, and the neck of defeated animals is located at the very point where the spiral rotation moves outward, and moves in its direction. This also contributes to the reduction in tension and contractile space over the scene and enhancement of cognitive space. Given the location of the beast and dying animal, it could be said that the prey is weak and the rushing animal is dominant and string (Fig.8).



Fig.9: fighting between mythical animals in the study carpet's context.

Type of representation and the illustration of the two animals puts us in a mythical aura. Because these creatures do not exist in reality. The presence of the fins on both sides of the figures underlines the mythological and ritual theme of these motifs. It should be noted that mythical, rituals and traditional themes in artistic discourses such as carpet leads to a distinction between good and bad, good and evil, ascension and fall, etc. on the other hand, while

the dominant and powerful animal as hunter has dominated the prey, as if the prey would not be able to continue the fight or is unwilling to continue the confrontation. The contractile form of the actor (the beast) in contrast to the dead and defeated body of the exhausted animal had led to a reciprocal flow, tension, contraction, and closure of semiotic and semantic system, and a pressurized current in contrast to the extension, openness, separation, etc.

Since a part of the system governing the engaging motifs in Safavid era is subject to mythical and symbolic concepts, the above-mentioned scene can be adaptable to value-based mythical-ritual systems due to the special imaginary and unnatural form of the animals depicted. However, relying on purely mythical and ritual reading and interpretation of such motifs can limit our scope of investigation into structural analyses, and this is the same limitation that we seeks to overcome in the current research. Therefore, by an inevitable reliance upon mythical motifs, the current research's authors seek to present a newer interpretation. In mythical culture, wing is one of the most influential elements to present a semiology of the motifs. "Wings on the human body or animals symbolize God and divine protection... winged animals are also the result of mixing different features of the gods" (Hall, 2001: 30).

In this discourse, two fighting mythical creatures have fins on the sides of their hands. According to James Hall, fight between two winged creatures (assuming their divinity) while one of them is winged lion and another is an animal whose feet form is like horse



hoof and more importantly has tails with fins on the hands and sweep-like tails, is of critical significance. Lion is the sign of power, the sun and the like in Persian and Mesopotamia's civilization. Add wings to the lion introduces it as a holy creature with superhuman powers. Horses also (assuming that the imaginary creature is horse) have a high status in many civilizations, and even they had been the symbol of Tishtar as the Design of Rain, sometime they pushed Deitys' wheel, and even sacrificed at the feet of the deities. Of course in burial art, the horse is the symbol of death, and has the duty of seizing the soul of the deceased. Horse as a sacrificial animal has been repeatedly praised in Brahmanical literature (ibid: 24 & 25). Based on the above, the winged lion and a winged creature can show that someone or something has achieved a sort of holiness and venerability in a particular era in the history. Thus, to protect it, some people sacrificed themselves and devoted their soul for its own sake. Many examples of this practice and ideology can be found in Sufism.

In fact, the Executioners and Safavid's punishment system, more than emphasis on the ways to punish the offenders, were determined to punish those who caused the king's wrath. As a result, the offenders were not considered mere culprits but the national violators doomed to complete destruction. Accordingly, it would be possible to interpret three value systems from this discursive system including servitude, captivity, and devotion. Just below the body of the imaginary creature, we can observe a naturalistic form of a deer that as if is fleeing. A little distant from a flower and Chinese clouds, there could be a roaring lioness at the top of the deer's head. The location of the deer behind the flowers and clouds has put it in a safe environment, but form of the body and head that looks back is indicative of his mistrust in this stability and security. On the other hand, the placement of the lioness behind the same flowers has put him in the situation similar to lurking, and suggests waiting for an opportunity to attack the deer. In this case also the lioness is in an ambush situation under a stable state, of course the stability that shifts to instability due to the positioning of the prey in a proper state. Both actors are in a state of stability and instability. The lioness's placement on top of the deer can show his superiority over the elusive creature. In such space, we are faced with a perspective in which one is situated at the upper-hand and another at the lower-hand, and this leads to the supremacy of one over another. The space of both creatures due to the positioning along with spiral lines and Shah Abbasi flowers has special and cognitive dimensions. However, as the lion is lurked adjacent to Chinese clouds, and a larger Shah Abbasi flower has reduced the spatial expansion, more tension can be seen in the scene. The deer has moved forward the closed side of the toranj and helped the opening of space and add to the cognitive aspect. On the other hand, the position of the deer in the midst of the battle also helps create tension discourse. In fact, the positioning of the deer in a tense atmosphere evokes the tension between the inflamed and tumultuous Iran's border with the Ottoman, Uzbek and south of the country in Safavid Iran.

Lachaks' hunting motifs

The frame-like lachaks in the carpet portrays a fighting between three riders and three animals. In the lowest part, we can see the confrontation between a hunter and lioness. In this scene, sword in hand, the hunter attacks the lioness and seeks to kill the animal. However, the lioness seeks to defend itself and fight with the hunter.



The conflict between the two occurs when the rider is putting pressure on its prey from above, and as if intends to prove his dominance. On the other hand, the lioness seeks to push itself toward the upper part and approaches its hand to the horse snout to prove its power over the hunter. In this situation, it can be seen that two actors are trying to prove their superiority and power on the opposite side. Of course, as the direction of the looks is top-down and bottom-up, it could be said that the hunter has supremacy over the prey. In the confrontations between man and animal, due to human's enjoyment of thinking power, the cognitive domain is more expansive than the physical power (Fig.10). In this case, by reducing the emotional tension, the tension would be reduced. While the human actor on horseback is marching ahead, the animal defends himself in a relatively static state and with the feet sticking to the floor. Although this scene is somewhat tensional, the tension perpetuates to the most extreme point. Using a weapon such as sword, the hunter fights the animal, and as lasso and bow are used in the scene, then the scene lacks high moral values in comparison to other hunting scenes. This is because, whatever in a hunting scene the hunter uses heavier hunting devices, and kill the hunted animal more savagely, the extent of virtue will be further reduced. In the middle of lachak, a rider of the white horse that has fettered a ram rides in the opposite direction. However, the ram seeks to change the riding direction and both actors are located in one direction in terms of motion and position. The distance between the hunter and prey is so much, hence the cognitive extent is added and emotional pressure is diminished. As a tool that can reduce this cognitive domain, lasso rope can disrupt stability. In addition, by creating instability and making the animal close to the hunter, the rope further increases emotional pressure and tension. The ram's movement to the sidelines and hunter's use of two hands for pulling the lasso while his horse passionately moves opposite side can show that the ram has the same physical stamina as the hunter and even a bit more powerful than the hunter. Use of a lasso to capture the animal can also lead to more moral values compared to other hunting scenes. The highest point of the lachak portrays a hunting scene that has come already to an end. While the hunter on horseback is rushing toward the marginal parts and looks back, and the hand that has held the bow can be seen in a downward position. However, three signs including the hunter's positioning, the hand that is still at a high position after shooting, and the hunter's stare at the prey from above, all show the hunter's supremacy over the prey. Under this situation, the hunter is the same hunting actor, and the prey or the wolf is the hunting object.

Although by the movement of the horse alongside the marginal parts this range is increased, and the stress intensity of the hunting and the conflict between the two actors is reduced, cognitive domain in this part of the discourse system is limited. This issue shows a lack of stability of the tension in this scene. While the first hunter uses the sword, and the second one uses lasso, the actor's use of bows and arrows in terms of moral values puts him in an interstitial condition.

Conclusions

Safavid era as one of the turning points of Iranian history is full of great cultural achievements. During this period, important events occurred which resulted in many transformations in the field of

culture and art of Iran, and their effects on the body of the land remained a very long time. The most important and influential achievement of the Safavids was to give recognition to the Shia across the country. The Safavids as a large family were the descendants of Sheikh Safi Al-Din Ardabili and some of the historians of the time attributed their origin to the sixth Imam of Shiites. Under some specific objectives (not merely devotion to the Shia), they set out to create a strong central government with a focus on their Shiite rulers. Safavid rulers paid special attention and care to cultural processes and artwork. Large royal workshops dating back to the reign of Ismaeil I in Tabriz to Tahmasb Shah in Qazvin and then Isfahan all are witnesses to Safavid's proclivity to art. Persian carpets as original artistic handcrafts were also highly regarded by the Safavid rulers. The very beautiful motifs used in Safavid's carpets are indicative of the glorious period of 9 to 11 centuries. One of the most important designs of Safavi's carpets is hunting and engaging scenes.

This motif is of one of the ancient and mythical themes in the art of Iran, and has rich and beautiful meanings symbolically. Notably, in classifying the engaging motifs in Safavid's era, the most important thing is bipolar oppositions and cosmological aspects of the motifs. Based on this approach, the motifs come to end and face an impasse. In value-based semiotics, we believe that although the themes of these motifs in ancient times are satiated with these oppositions and cosmological aspects, yet in the context under study in the current research (Safavid era), these two principles are not the only cause to the formation of these motifs. Rather, other community values including religious, moral-ideological, social values and some actions can be analyzed and interpreted to obtain a readable value in analyzing these figures. Thus, in some cases, the binary oppositions are not any longer absolute good or absolute evil. Basically, there is no bipolar confrontation, and a ritual scarpetgle is taking place to present a supernatural human power. And this reflects the indisputable impact of value systems in classifying the hunting ground motifs.



Fig.9: the lachak with hunting ground scenes



In semiotics and semantics approaches, the significant point is the fluidity of meaning. In this sense, the meaning does not come to end ever. Now, if we want to investigate the hunting motifs in Safavid's carpets, one absolute meaning cannot either be sufficed. In conventional readings of hunting motifs, always a side is "good" and another is "evil". However, in this new reading, in addition to binary readings, other dimensions are explored. These dimensions that are so called value systems are a range of beliefs and ideas prevailed on the era of the formation of these motifs, and can create social, religious, moral and class-based values, and it would be possible to extract them from the text or discourse under study through the regeneration of the studied context (the regeneration of the context dating back to Safavid dynasty).

Notes

- ⁱ .Nizamuddin Sultan Mohammad Tabrizi or Iraqi, skilled *negargar* (painter) of Safavid era (1477 to 1555 AD), was a *negargar* (painter) in the court of Shah Tahmasp Safavid. The *negragary* (painting) style of Sultan Muhammad is School of Tabriz (the second period). His artistic works in the first midst of his artistic life are influenced by the pre-Safavid artistic style in western Iran. However, after that, his wroks reflects new conventional events in Safavid court. For the first part, we can mention his works in Shahnameh Tahmasbi (so called Hafton), and for the second part, we can refer to his paintings in Divan Hafez (1531 to 1533 AD).
- ⁱⁱ . Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Mahdī : محمد بن الحسن المهدي, is believed by Muslims to be the [Mahdī](#), an ultimate savior of humankind and the final [Imām](#) of [the Twelve Imams](#) who will emerge with [Isa](#) (Jesus Christ) in order to fulfill their mission of bringing peace and justice to the world).
- ⁱⁱⁱ . Within the Islamic tradition, the term refers to the family of the [Islamic prophet Muhammad](#)
- ^{iv} . Jean Chardin (16 November 1643-5 January 1713) was a French jeweler and tourist whose 10-volume book entitled "Travels of Sir John Chardin" is regarded as one of the best works of Western scholars in Iran and the Middle East. The book was first published in Iran under the title of "Chardin Travelogue" translated by Mohammad Abbasi and in Amir Kabir Publication Center in 1956.
- ^v . Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1014-1100 AH/1605- 1689 AD), is a famous French explorer and trader which tarvalled Iran in Safavid Persia and the Orient for several times. His travelogue as a chronology of the Safavid period events and the happenings of Safavid Court is very important.
- ^{vi} . ⁴Robert Shirley (1581-1628) was a world traveler and adventurer who along with his brother Anthony English, traveled to Iran in 1598 to teach the Safavid army. He also had mission to strengthen Iran's artillery units and to drill army forces.
- ^{vii} . the supreme god of the ancient Iranians, whose cult was propagated by the legendary prophet Zarathustra
- ^{viii} . the evil spirit in the dualistic doctrine of Zoroastrianism
- ^{ix} . as a now-extinct branch of [Zoroastrianism](#) in which the divinity Zurvan is a First Principle primordial



¹⁰.Quoted from "Rozat Al-Safavia" and regarding the history of cannibals, Falsafi states that Shah Ismaeil I conquered and then murdered Shibak Khan near the town of Marv in 916 AD. After killing Shibak, Shah Ismael hits three fatal knocks of sword on the body of the dead ruler, and orders the Sufis that everyone who is a zealot of me eat the flesh of this murderer. Khwaja Mahmoud Sagharchy who was present at the scene narrates that after the king's command, the rush of the Sufis to eat the dead flesh of Shibak Khan reached the point that a conflict ensued between some of the companions, and they took apart and then ate the flesh of the dead body same as vouchers.

¹¹. Clay tablet from the Indus Valley (millennial) depicts a tiger among other animals surrounding a deity that it is assumed that the tiger was superior to the god Shiva (Ruler of the animals).

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