

A SEMIOTIC STUDY ON PICTORIAL RUG OF BAHRAM GUR'S PRESERVER (HUNTING GROUND) IN QAJARIAN PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

Qajar period can be called a milestone in Iran's carpet weaving art. In this period, carpets under the name of pictorial rug emerged that have not merely woven for the purpose of coating the ground but their decorative aspect has considered superior. One of the unique sample of this kind of carpets is pictorial rug of Bahram Gur's hunting ground". The purpose of this research is considering the signs of Peirce's Semiotics in this rug. The research method in this study is descriptive-analytic study. Library and documentary method has been used for gathering information. It follows from the results of this research that the used signs in this valuable rug are not merely recreating the actual image of a narration, but they follow a special concept that eventually represent a symbolic image from Bahram and Kanizak tale. The signs of the rug present a kind of coherence and cohesion. We observe figures with inexpressive and even vague faces in this image. Any how the illustrator has reflected their themes with selection of the best signs.

Keywords: *Bahram Gur, Pictorial Rug, Semiotics, Hunting Ground, Qajar Period*

Introduction:

The Iranian rug weaver artist has long been followed depicting his own surrounding world in the shape of symbolic formats. "Traditional arts especially the national art of Iran, the rug weaving, is one of the most prominent and outstanding strategies and atmosphere for cognition of the Iranian culture and identity with the language of sign and image" (Amini, 2006). "Over times the rug weaver artist has woven his hopes, desires, imaginations, gravities and beliefs on the rug in the shape of beautiful patterns" (Shayeste and Poor, 2002) and in this way they use so many signs to decorate and express their destinations and intentions better. According to authors although so many research has been done about this rug, this work of art has not been considered on the basis of semiotics yet. There are some examples of research about this rug on the view of other factors:

MA thesis under the title of "transition and evolution of patterns and structure of Safavieh and Qajar rugs" by Tayebe (2009)

Comparative study of hunting display in Safavieh and Qajar rugs, by Tayebe Sabbagh Poor.

Consideration of pictorial rugs of Qajar period in rug museum of Iran, by Mahnaz Shayeste Far and Tayebe Sabbagh Poor.

Patterns of Iranian handy woven rugs elements and signs of national identity, by Mohammad Afroogh.

In all of the above examples has been just considered a brief description of this rug. The aim of this research is considering the existent signs of the rug according to Peirce's Semiotics and following the answer of this questions: Are the signs of the rug merely following depicting one of the narration of Nezami Ganjavi's tale or not?

Which signs have had roles in depicting this work of art?

This article has been started with this hypothesis that there are so many signs in this work of art and the existent signs beside their narrative aspects are attending implication of concepts to its audience. The historical numbers are based on lunar calendar, and their AD equivalence has been mentioned.

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Research Method

What has been presented in this article is the result of consideration of one of the Qajar pictorial rugs of rug museum of Iran. The descriptive-analytic research method has been chosen and also Library and documentary method has been used for gathering information.

An Introduction to Semiotics

One of the most general definitions of semiotics is Umberto Eco's definition. He says: "semiotics deals with everything that called sign". From the view of semiotics, "signs can be appear in the shape of words, images, sounds, manners and thing". (Chandler, 2008) There are two divergent traditions in semiotics that have originated from a Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), and an American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Ferdinand de Saussure presents a dyadic model for the sign. From his view a sign is composed of signifier (sound pattern) and signified (concept). "Sign is a whole that results from the association of signifier and signified. The relation between signifier and signified is referred to as signification" (Sojoodi, 2013). A sign should consist of both a signifier and a signified. There is not a completely meaningless signifier or a completely formless signified. Each sign is a special association of specific signifier and signified. Peirce present a triadic model for a sign:

1. The representamen: the form which the sign takes
2. An interpretant: not an interpreter but rather the sense made of the sign.
3. An object: something beyond the sign to which it refers (a referent). (Chandler, 2008)

In Peirce's view there are three kind of signs:

Icon: which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified.

Index: which the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some way (physically or causally) to the signified.

Symbol: which the signifier does not resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional.

There is some aspects in semiotics that analyze the relation and distinction of signifier and signified. "Implicit and explicit implication are two fundamental form of implication. Science belongs to those group of messages that explicit implication play a dominant role in it, and arts belongs to those group of messages that implicit implication play a dominant role in it. In explicit implication we confront with those signified that depicted as well as it is and objectively. On the other hand implicit implication present the mental values by means of form and function of signs" (Pahlavan, 2011).

Pictorial Rug (Qali):

Qali (rug) is a Turkish word that named for the heavy textiles that used for coating ground, wall and other flat large surface (Panje, 2008).

This article considers one of the rugs of Qajar period (1796-1926 AD). "During the Qajar government due to revival and development of rug weaving specially at the late 13th century, coincidence with reign of Naser al-Din Shah, and also sudden and dramatic increase of European's demand for Iranian's rugs, can be called a milestone in Iran's carpet weaving art" (Schmidt *et al.*, 2004). In this period Iranian society inspired by west, stepped through modernity and civilization. Following the developments that modernity brought, human as an independent existence, found special place in arts (Milani, 2008). "Weaving pictorial rugs in Iranian rug weaving art established fundamental development in this art. Purpose of weaving this rugs was decorative rather than practical" (Afroogh and Barati, 2013).

"Pictorial patterns are the group of patterns that depict the historical, religious, fictional and literary subject, or describe landscapes. Dominantly this kind of patterns has narrative aspect and represent a specific subject. What we observe in this group of patterns is display of something natural and real not abstract and fictitious. Also their motif almost is consist of figurative and human patterns, inanimate objects or nature. Pictorial rugs of Qajar are consist of kings and celebrities' images, literary, European and religious themes, and ancient and specific patterns (Shayeste and Sabbagh, 2011). This kind of rug has not merely woven for the purpose of coating the ground, but its visual usage has been the major purpose"(Afroogh and Barati, 2013). In Qajar period due to inspiration from European arts, artistic concentration changes from abstract subject to naturalism one. As a conclusion we observe changes in

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pattern and subject of works that have affected on patterns of textiles and fabrics. In this period complex and detailed patterns of flowers and blooms frequently with warm and bright color were popular. In addition to new forms and subjects in the Qajar decorative art, application of new colors like red, yellow, light orange, pink and white in decoration of this period is observed, while it was not common before (Zaboli Nezhad, 2009).

Bahram Gur's preserver rug (Picture No.1).



Picture 1: Bahram Gur's pictorial rug (Dadgar, 2001)

Size: 127 cm×204cm color type: natural, herbal

Subject: tale of Bahram Gur and his bondswoman poets: from Nezami Ganjavi

Place of weaving: Kashan (Shayeste Far, Khan Ali Poor, 2002) date of weaving: 19th century

Main colors: cream, light and dark pink, dark and light blue, dark brown, mustard (Dadgar, 2001)

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There is an image of Bahram Gur's hunting ground on this rug (Pakbaz, 2012). Content of this image is inspired from Haft Peikar tales in Nezami's book that called Khamse. Experts of art believe that this book should be of the most influential factors in the Iranian art illustration after Ferdowsi's Shahname. Expression of Nezami's tales in pictorial rug has had a wide reflection. We observe Bahram with his companions while he has sewn the leg of his prey to its ear in the pattern of this rug. His companions and bondwomen with Qajar costumes and makeups are the observer of the hunting scene far away from him (Dadgar, 2001).

This work of art depends on its time, and also reflects intellectual, political, economic, social and cultural aspect of its historical period. This rug simply and beautifully present symbolic concepts and also express a specific narration from subject of hunting in the form of literary and historical adventure. Therefore, design elements and motifs in the composition or in the form have been used to transfer this subject. Bahram and his favorite bondwoman, Fetne, is observed in the pattern of this rug. This work of art has illustrated a hunting rite with narrative and realistic view. Hunting has been one of the most significant subjects of art in whole periods of Iranian history. Display of Hunting in works of art in addition to its symbolic aspect, was one of the most popular hobbies of Iranian kings and noblemen (Zaboli Nezhad, 2012). Designer has benefited from hunting ground pattern. "Major fundamental of this group of patterns is hunting and hunting ground, so that in every place of the pattern Horseback rider is shown with his bow and arrow or spear busy in deer hunting (Zhoole, 2011).

The weaver has chosen the scene of hunting of the prey as peak point of the tale for his work of art. As well the composition and selection of elements, sight direction and the existent semiotic differences in the other elements show that main character is Bahram (Picture No.2).

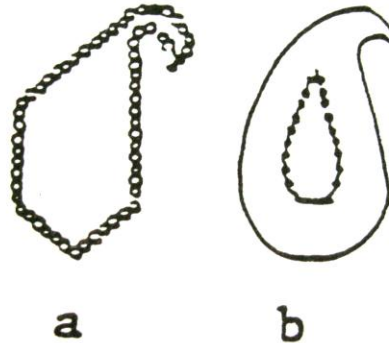


Picture 2: Bahram Gur (Dadgar, 2001)

The artist has been able to demonstrate Bahram as a main character by placing him in the nearest layer to the observer. Bahram has been depicted in the center of image, horseback, in comfort, while he has hunted a prey and sewn the ear and foot of the prey by an arrow. Besides the illustrator has emphasized on Bahram as the main character by putting another signs. Sumptuous and elegant costume, jeweled crown, are parts of this character's features that are signified of Bahram's power and authority. Illustrator has always paid a lot of attention to details and tried to depict Bahram's costume different from other's. The artist has presented a total Qajar face by using iconic signs such as long black mustache, slender body, and unibrow.

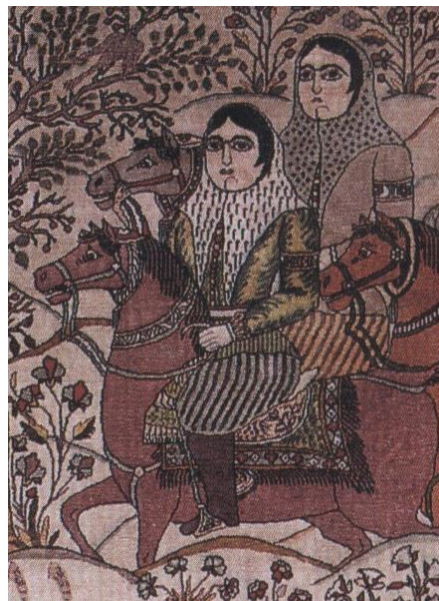
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Bahram has been depicted with signifiers such as: horse and bow, that are the other signified of this character's power and degree. Bahram Gur's raised right hand displays his important and leader character. The cover of his horse (Ashghar) is so important; it counts as another index of Qajar period, because the illustrator has benefited from an iconic sign called Boteh to decorate this cover. "Boteh is similar to a leaf with a curved tip that called pear or teardrop in west and also is similar to pine-like motifs of cashmere" (Schmidt, *et al.*, 2004). Boteh is also similar to Paisley patterns and is applied to decorate the margin and context of rugs in different forms (Zhoole, 2011) (Picture No.3).



Picture 3: Boteh pattern (Schmidt *et al.*)

Fetne and the other bondwomen are observer of the scene, horseback, on top of the image. It is interesting that the costumes and face makeups have the Qajar signs. According to analyzes Kanizak is the woman who is on the highest layer, because his costumes have been depicted more detailed and specific and also more front than the others. Her face is a symbol of a Qajar woman. Big, black eyes with black unibrow and hair. (Picture No.4) All of the depicted characters of this rug are the sign of the king's importance and highlighting of his power and authority.



Picture 4: Fetne, Bahram Gur's bondwoman with the other bondwoman (Dadgar, 2001)

Animals have been depicted realistically in this work of art, and it proves the Qajar artist's interest in realistic and naturalistic display of events and animals like horse, deer, rabbits, duck and dog that have

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been shown while they are fleeing in different directions. The illustrator has marked the hunted deer with darker color to attract viewer's attention. Scars on skin of deer, dark color selection and the curved shape of deer body are signified of display of captivity, suffering and devastation (Picture No.5).



Picture 5: Hunted deer by Bahram (Dadgar, 2001)

Element of color is a sign to attract viewer's attention in this work of art. Colors represent harmony and connection among elements in all levels of this work of art. Blue, red, light orange and pink have established the most connection. The illustrator smartly has placed dark colors in upper layers and the light ones in lower layers to establish an index for inducing depth and perspective. For example selection of dark orange for closer horse and the bright orange for further one.

Context pattern of the rug is consist of trees in bloom, flowers and apparently melodious birds. This elements can be temporal and spatial signs of this narration. Spring has been depicted in this rug. Birds are signified of beauty, freedom and sweet singing. Trees are cause of adornment in this illustration. All this iconic signs are signified of life, happiness and endeavor. These motifs make the rug more attractive. The principles of perspective have not been observed in this rug and the illustrator has put images on top and bottom of the rug to show distance and nearness.

The narration of Bahram and Kanizak has been narrated in the format of image and poet. The margin of this rug is one of the most beautiful and impressive aspects of it. Forty two verses of Nezami's poems has been woven into the frame, all-around of its big and small margin. "When patterns, colors and illustrations are not enough for demonstration, artists take advantages of calligraphy. Sometimes calligraphy is applied as an innovative pattern in rugs" (Shayeste and Khan, 2002). It is attempted to write down the narration of this tale in the margin of the rug to transfer the concepts of this work of art better and narrate it more properly. "This poets have been written in Nastaliq calligraphic hand. Nastaliq is easy to read and nowadays because of its beauty, legibility and speed in writing applies more and use in rug weaving" (Shayeste and Khan, 2002) (Picture No.6&7).

Signs of this rug demonstrate kind of coherence and cohesion. Direction of Bahram Gur's right hand, direction of one of the companion's hand and direction of bondwomen movement and deer attract viewer's attention to rest of the tale. In fact an internal dynamic that is originated from action of hunting, is created with a rotational and circular combination in work of art.



Picture No.6: Transversal Margin



Picture No.7: Tongitudinal Margin

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CONCLUSION

From investigations that conducted with authors and the other researchers on Bahram Gur's pictorial rug, we observe a specific narration of hunting in the format of a historical and literary phenomenon.

According to author's semiotic analysis it comes that the used signs in this rug are not merely recreating the actual image of a narration, but the design elements, and motifs in the composition or in the form has been used to transfer concepts to audience. The other point is observation of figures with inexpressive and even vague faces in this image. The illustrator properly has reflected the themes of each element in this work of art by selecting the best signs and preserving aesthetic elements.

Ps: Qajar is an imperial government that began under authority of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar and ended with Ahmad Shah Qajar's reign (Ghafari, 2010)

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