

Full Length Research

A symbolic kurdish carpet: analysis of the meaning

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The work analyzes a symbolic Kurdish carpet from the Senneh area. Bibliographic research applied only to the field of Persian pictorial and symbolic carpets does not allow to draw significant conclusions obtained by comparison. In fact, the findings are practically non-existent. By extending the research to the Iranian iconography up to the times of the prophet Zoroaster, and to pre-Islamic myths and traditions, it is possible to identify hidden symbols and meanings. In particular, with the detailed geometric-dimensional analysis and the graphic rendering of some compositional elements of the carpet, it is possible to identify specific characteristics such as, for example, words in the Avestan alphabet. This evidence suggests that the carpet has links to the Zoroastrian community, with possible celebratory functions.

Keywords: Kurdish carpet, symbols, meaning

INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the symbolic meaning of a Persian rug must be carried out in disregard of the typical western mentality (European and Anglo-Saxon). The main feature of the work is its decorative and aesthetic function, and it tends to use symbols to identify the place of origin and to estimate its commercial value. Fatemeh Safaii Rad (2012).

For the Iranian and Central Asian peoples, the carpet has a deep meaning of conservation and transmission of the ancient traditions of these people. The weaving of the carpet in its various forms that we will briefly examine represents at all levels a deeply rooted and unifying action of belonging to the traditions and spiritual teachings of the past, which define the "culture of a nation". Mason Caroline A. (2002).

The carpet conveys to the next generation the traditions and values of these peoples. It is noted that, even with the passing of the centuries, with the overlapping of "new" myths and religions, due to invasions and conquests, the attachment to the ancient traditions dating back to the time of the Achaemenids

and the prophet Zoroaster remains deep, and in some cases to previous epochs, with the development of mutual influences and contaminations. With the archaeological discoveries of the twentieth century it has been shown reasonably that the weaving of the carpet in its completed form was known and practiced at high levels already centuries before the birth of Christ (Pazyryk). Youssef Azemoun (2018) performs a careful analysis of the linguistic roots of the word carpet in Turkey and Iran. Which derives from more ancient forms of Turkmen origin, which connect the word carpet, marriage, the action of knotting (creation of a new bond-family), to the action of cutting the knot (splitting the bond with the family of parents), to the yurt (the house of nomads). The mothers in fact taught the young people who were preparing for marriage, to weave the carpets, which in various forms (floor, entrance door, bag, blanket, decoration of the tent and animals of burden) would become the functional and decorative elements of the yurt of the new family. The realization of the carpet is the condensation of technical and artistic skills ranging from the choice of

wool, carding, spinning, dyeing, the positioning of the loom, the warp tension, to the creation of the design to be reproduced with the tying of successive rows of tufts of wool of the various colors knotted to two warps at a time and separated by one or more weft passages. It is significant to note that, whether the carpet was made by a young woman from a nomadic tribe with materials and skills of the inhabitants of their own camp (village), or that it comes from an important city atelier, which possessed an “expert” for each activity listed above, the artistic result, also for the Western artistic sensibility is of the highest level, in terms of modernity, as you can see browsing the catalogues of museums and collections around the world. In this regard, think of the process that took place in Western and Russian painting at the turn of the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the theme of “abstractionism” and representation. The two typological categories of the drawing: 1) the geometric drawing with straight segments (composition of horizontal, vertical and inclined segments according to the ratio: number of vertical nodes/number of horizontal nodes), 2) the curvilinear drawing, (historically posterior) which lends itself to the representation of the figurative subject, can have two justifications: the Iranians are Shiites unlike the Sunni Turks, for whom it is absolutely forbidden the reproduction on carpets of living beings, then the carpets “figured” are typically Persian AcklesSharla F. (1988). The second reason is that in the city ateliers there was the ustad, the designer on cardboard of the carpet, vice versa between nomads and villages the design was often reproduced “by heart”, so the drawing with straight segments was better suited to the purpose, ParvinGhazizadeh-Tehrani (1976). Ahani L., Yaghoubzadeh A., Vandshoari A. (2017) propose a catalogue of pictorial and figurative carpets from the Qajar era, with a division into categories according to the contents of the carpet. Proceeding with a criterion of similarity, the categories to be explored could be “mystical contents”, “religious”, “imaginary and moral”, “celebratory” with regard to the case presented here, which is particularly multiform and alien to Western influences. In the work of AcklesSharla F. (1988) there is an interesting list of purposes, for which a carpet was once woven in the regions of Iranian influence.

Objectives

The principal goal of this work is to formulate at least some realistic conjectures on the symbolic meaning of this unusual rug (Fig.1), that shows a deeper content than that which comes from the simple comparison with bibliographic research.



Figure 1: Kurdish carpet of the area of Senneh object of the present study.

METHODOLOGY

First of all, the compositional and geometric characteristics of the carpet are compared with the canons present in the related literature and in the catalogues of the collections and museums, to identify works with a high degree of similitude, also from a technical point of view (i.e. materials). Based on the results of the first analysis, with the use of digital graphics, the compositional and symbolic elements of the carpet are selected to compare them on a wider spectrum with the iconographic, historical, artistic and sociological bibliography of the area to which they belong.



Figure 2: Dimensional identification of the composite geometry of the carpet under study.

Table 1:

		<p>Dimensions: 202 x 143 cm Pile: wool Warp: cotton Weft: cotton Knot: symmetric Knotdensity: 3,5h.x 8 v. Knots/dm² = 2800.</p>
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GEOMETRIC DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS

We proceed, first with the geometric dimensional analysis to identify the parts that characterize the carpet, which could fall into the category of symmetrical medallion carpets. It is also more difficult to clarify whether it can be considered to belong to the wider category of medallion and spandrel carpets, since, in the spandrel position, in symmetry, are placed symbolic figures that appear as among the most significant parts from the compositional point of view of the entire carpet.

The carpet has a main border and two secondary borders that delimit the main border internally and externally Figure 2. The main border has two distinct types with reference to the vertical and horizontal axes of the carpet: vertical type is characterised by vertical stem "palmette", left/right lateral bud, flower at the apex of the stem; horizontal type by curved stem "branch" with small leaves, flowers and buds with large terminal flower. The vertical typology shows (apparently) a preferred

direction of reading. The medallion is inscribed progressively from the center into more concentric ovals of increasing size. It is possible to evaluate the size of the torunj or oval part of the medallion (oval area defined at less than the two ends pendants) or in 952 or 757 mm that according to the canons recalled in ParvinGhazizadeh-Tehrani (1976) should be equal to one third of the length (2038 mm) of the whole carpet. Specifically, the ratio is 1:2,15 or 1:2,7. The main border is 206 mm wide: according to the above mentioned canons the ratio between the width of the border and that of the carpet (1429 mm) should be equal to one sixth, the actual ratio is 1:6.9. The two smaller borders have identical dimensions of 101 mm.

The canon suggests that the sum of the smaller border widths equals the width of the main border, as is actually the case in the present carpet.

THE BORDERS

The vertical border, as mentioned above, is composed of a main border and two "minor" borders. The decoration of the main border is of floral type realized with a row of stylized stalks and "palmette" with on top a flower with six petals (?) bordered in blue. Figure 3.



Figure 3: Borders: horizontal lower, horizontal upper, vertical: lower, central and upper.

At the base of the stalks we notice a bud placed alternately to the right or to the left of the stem. The last stalk of the row before moving to the horizontal direction does not have a flower, but a red bud with ample blue border, vice versa the first is "cut" on the fifth leaf and therefore does not have the lateral bud. The bibliographic research carried out shows that a typology "floral" as the present is very rare. The only references can be found in the tribal and village production of the Kurd, Afshari, Qashqai populations of Iran and the Caucasus. Let's examine the following bibliographical references: motif P-10 "Palmette lattice" p. 234 by Stone Peter F. (2004). Note that it is an Afshari field motif that we find for example in the carpet n.229 pag. 334 by Eskenazi John J. (1987). Proceeding further, something similar is evident in the P-24 motif "Flowering Plant" pag.244 by Stone Peter F. (2004) in the Bakhtiari context, still as a field motif. The motif P-78 pag. 266 by Stone Peter F. (2004) can be cited as the border motif "Shisboluki border" of Qashqai ambit, in which the small stalk ends with the henna flower (Gulihinnai): note that all the lateral stalks in "herringbone" patterns end with a small flower. In contrast to what is observed in the decoration we are examining, which seems to represent a stalk with stylized leaves, a flower with six petals and a bud both

red in color, you can also think of other interpretations. As the sprout may seem other (flame, do not forget the Zoroastrian temples) and also the flower has a particular stylization); paying further attention it is noted that some twigs end with enlargements that resemble buds in preparation. With reference to the horizontal border it should be noted that significantly changes the setting of the floral decoration characterized by the prevalent presence of the red flower, without stalk with "palmette", connected to curved stalks with small flowers and leaves; in similarity with the pattern K-23 "leaf and blossom" on page 197 by Stone Peter F. (2004), Kurdish motifs. On the bag face of Afshari origin on page 157 by Mac Donald Brian W. (2017) you can see the border of pomegranate flowers that has similarities with the one in question. If the flowers were interpreted in function of the number of petals and the color as pomegranate flowers with reference to the work of Shirin Rostami (2015) we could think of pomegranate as a symbol of abundance and fertility that recalls the goddess Anahita, goddess of water.

THE FIELD

The medallion

The definition of medallion rug is of western origin and refers to the central part of the field bounded by polylobate edges with double symmetry. The medallion, according to TelmanIbrahimov (2018) comes from the transfer on the carpet by the ancient masters of the decorations present on the cover of the Qur'an, to create the large carpets of the Islamic courts during the period of maximum splendour. The decorations on the cover of the Qur'an relate to the one god, to the light, to the sun and gradually through successive transformations to his eternal home (paradise) that is the garden par excellence with flowers of all kinds, (medallion with floral decorations). In the present case, the carpet is of limited size and appears to contain several symbols pertaining to pre-Islamic religions of Persia. So while being the oval-shaped central space with the geometric properties of classical medallions with pendants, it cannot be classified in the same way, even if the medallion could still retain the meaning of garden of paradise, but with reference to the ancient Persian religions. Fatemeh Sheikh Asadi, MarziyeKazemzadeZinatJavanmard (2014) propose a comparative analysis of the design of the Iranian garden and the garden carpet, identifying common elements and principles. In particular it is identified within the third category of classification of the structure and composition, the partition scheme to "four parts", also the garden is separated from everything else by a wall. The first (central) reference point of the carpet-garden layout is the pond/small lake with the streams from which the water flows. Then there are the tree-lined and shady paths. The scheme of the garden can also be "flat" or "raised". Masoudi A. (2010). The four-sector scheme of the lush Persian gardens recalls the four-block plan of palaces like Mendel. Ideal world, spiritual world, real world, garden of Eden, paradise of water and coolness in contrast with the scorching heat of desert and evil. The struggle between Good and Evil and the struggle of Good over Evil is the focus of the mazdea religion (prophet Zoroaster). If the medallion were the representation of the Garden of Eden, of the Supreme Good, we could find: in the center a fountain/pond/ small lake with flowers from which depart 4 streams. (Indeed, the two-pointed square "gul" of the carpet we are analyzing has similar characteristics, in the corners there are wavy parallel lines symbolizing the current of a stream?). Flowers, plants, animals, paths, light in contrast with darkness (dark blue-black surrounding), light that could be recalled by the four "candelabra" symbols present on the two main axes of symmetry and shaped to single symmetry, also recall

the eternal fire of the Zoroastrian temples. With reference to the four forms that delimit the medallion in horizontal and vertical direction in the shape of a vase (?). They could symbolize the ground from which everything was born, the role of the pot/vase has a very long evolution in the myth, the cedar, as the source of creation was planted in a "pot". With reference to the partition of the medallion graphically obtained by constructing successive concentric ovals, see figure 2 we observe that: Inside the middle ring there are 8 red figures and 8 cream yellow figures that can remember the bronzes of Lorestan cited by Opie J. 1998. Similar figures and in the same number but smaller in size are found in the central oval which contains the square "Gul" with two tips of light and bright color with 8 red flowers, they could be lotus flowers. The symbol S in Kurdish is the initial of the ancient word that identified God, it is also used to recall the water, the snake and the dragon. In our case it would seem introduced a red-yellow cream dualism. Shirin Rostami (2015). The pendants could be formed by forms of "bush" of cream color in the lower part, red in the central part and cream in the upper part that contains a first niche of light color with red symbols and on the upper one blue space containing four red objects bordered of clear (initial natural substances?). Notice the symbology of the number 4. It is the sacred tree, the tree of life, symbol of eternity (?). The Zoroastrian calendar adopted in western Iran in 485 B.C. breaks down into four groups - as H.S. Nyberg observes - the days and deities of the month. These four groups symbolically constitute the god Zurvan, who rules all gods and gathers all beings. He is together the beginning, the center and the end. Ries J. (2013). The Avesta or Zend Avesta (or the Avesta with commentary), the first literature, contains four main parts, the Yasna, the Yashts, the Vîspered and the Vendîdâd. The central component of Zoroastrian messianism is faith in the future world saviors (saoshyant): Zoroaster himself and three others at the end of each millennium. Yasht XIII.128 refers to Uxshyat-ereta as the first saoshyant which is followed by Uxshyat-nemah the second, while Yasht XIII.129 names the last saoshyant as Astvat-ereta. Uxshyat-ereta is "the one who makes justice grow", Uxshyat-nemah "the one who grows devotion / reverence", while Astvat-ereta, is "the one who embodies justice".

A great light given by the primordial luminaries heralds a saoshyant. The birth of the world's savior, according to Zoroastrianism, is parthenogenetic. The Astvat-ereta is about to rise from Lake Kâsava, as a messenger of AhuraMazdâh. The Vendîdâd locates

the lake in the dawn region, which is somewhere east of Iran or beyond. The appearance of the saoshyants is the result of the yasna practices, to which those ceremonies of fire used to propitiate auspicious events. Sarbatoare O. (2004).

According to pre-Islamic cosmogony, the four initial natural substances are symbolically represented by the dragon. The dragon unites earth-sky-water-fire: (legs-earth; wings-air; scaly water-body; fire, breath of fire). The dragon is ambivalent: it is the source of life and death. The mythical Senmurv may be the Iranian transformation of the ancient Mesopotamian dragon,

Telmanbrahimov. Examining carefully and with photographic magnification some parts of the carpet such as: the "dragon's tail" in the four spandrels, and the four L-shaped cartouches contained in the intermediate oval Fig.2, you can see some symbols that should belong to an ancient writing. In particular, after long comparative graphic elaboration, vowels and consonants of the alphabet used in the Avesta texts, cited above, emerge.



Figure 4: Graphic processing of the symbols on the "dragon's tail", with identification of the letters of the Avestan alphabet.

In particular, the last five boxes, reading from right to left, seem to contain the word:
Saoshyant

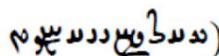
(Avestan: )

Figure 4 always indicates boxes with the both sides of the carpet recto, with the pile, and verso with knots.

THE SPANDRELS

Starting from one of the four corners formed by the smaller inner border, widespread decorations are observed of reduced size, shaped like branches, flowers and seeds (?) They could belong to the top part of the tree on which the sacred bird is perched, Saêna, who stands in the middle of the Vourukasha sea, or the eagle which is a version of the god of the storm who inhabits the "tree of keokern" in Kurdish culture. The name Saêna is identical to the Sanskrit Shyena, which was translated as eagle or hawk. Note the 3+1 symbols, which will be discussed later, which have a color with symmetrical distribution in red and blue: fire and water, emotions and feelings towards spirituality

(?). With reference to the colors and their meaning the following quote is quoted: "The symbolism of colors seems to transcend the philosophical differences between the three groups (Turks, Armenians and Persians). As mentioned, the color from the largest meaning for all eastern populations is turquoise. It is used to indicate good luck and to ward off evil. Red is the color of glory, strength and courage. Yellow or gold are used to symbolize wealth and worldly success. Black is the color of combat and war, pink represents dignity and blue is destiny. Green is a very important color for the Islamic people and is rarely used" by Ackles Sharla F. (1988). There are also other

interpretations of the meaning of colors Reza Samvat (1998): Pink represents love, purple represents knowledge, white/cream represents purity, blue represents spirituality, green represents healing, red/orange represents emotions and feelings, yellow is wisdom. The space of these zones is filled by a pattern of parallel wavy lines in a variable direction surrounding the main group of "symbols" placed in each of the four quadrants bounded by the decorations previously described by the axis of horizontal symmetry and by the quarter of oval outermost of the medallion. If you try to break down the group graphically, as far as possible, you can see four depth planes of field Fig.5:

1. In the foreground: the emblem (standard in English, divine or royal) see Van Dijk Renate Marian (2016); or the symbol of the Faravahar (Guardian Angel) as indicated in Fatemeh Safaii Rad (2012).

2. In the background. The "hybrid" bird, Comparetti Matteo (2016), the head is compatible with the stylization of a head of raptor: on the other hand, they have not been found in the bibliographic research testimony of hybrid birds with the dragon head placed at the opposite end. Some parts are edged with red and light blue/blue/purple on the back. Note the presence, in the lower part of the body of three protuberances in the shape of breast (?) On the same plane seems to be placed the pattern of wavy lines parallel light cream and, in one area, blue and red (water and fire?), but not the base (ground?) with the five "small roundish objects" (seeds?) and a filling part(?) blue. (earth and water?). This could be deduced from the fact that the parallel wavy lines are continuous passing over the more intense cream yellow base. (beneficial rain? With seeds). The eagle, king of birds, is the only bird that can watch the sun. In ethological and mythological beliefs it is a metaphor of contempt for the greatness of the world. The eagle was sacred in Kurdistan as a divine symbol. Eagle worship has a long history in Kurdistan and this huge bird is the symbol of power and clarity. The symbol of the eagle in the Kurdish carpet represents the power and victory, Shirim Rostami (2015). Simurgh is a mythical Iranian bird whose history dates back to at least 2500 years ago or even more in Iranian mythologies. The evolution of the myth had three distinct phases: a) The oldest phase belongs to the Zoroastrian scriptures including the Avesta, where the Simurgh (in Neo-persian, Senmurv in Middle Persian, Saena Maregha in Avestic) spreads the seeds of all plants, laid on the tree "vispô-bish".

b) The second phase belongs to the period of the epic poet Firdowsi (936-1020 E.V.). In his work "Shahnameh" (the book of kings) the poet tells that the magic bird, Simurgh, breeds "Zal", the albino child, and then helps his wife, Roodabeh, to give birth to their

son, Rostam the epic hero, with a caesarean section and heals her wounds with the magical powers of her feathers.

c) And finally the story of the Simurgh told by Attar (1145 - 1221 E.V.) in his mystical poem, "The Parliament of the Birds", where the Simurgh has a metaphorical role as a mystic leader.

3. The third plane of decomposition. Dragon with "wattles" and partially hidden body behind the bird, as seen in the graphic reconstruction, and tail on the opposite side. Some parts are bordered with red. the dragon is a symbol of the darkness in the Kurdish culture. The conflict between the eagle and the dragon reflects the world. One of the rugs kept in the Imperial Museum in Berlin shows the conflict between the eagle and the dragon on a yellow background as a symbol of the war between the Kurdish people and the Mongol people. The eagle is the symbol of the power of the kingdom and the dragon is the symbol of the conqueror. Contrary to Turkish-Mongol and Chinese dragon symbolism, the Aryan tribes inhabiting the territory of Iran possess another image of the dragon, dating back to the sacred "Avesta". Azhi Dahak is a tricephaly dragon (neo-persian for azhdahak dragon) extremely negative and source of evil. Telman Ibrahimov (2018).

4. Fourth plan of decomposition. Snake head. The graphical reconstruction seems to show that it is "not connected" and in the back position at all. Regarding the importance of water and the serpent in the Kurdish carpet, the serpent is present both in its abstract form of dragon and in its appearances. The serpent is the symbol of the earth and is linked to the origin of life which began with the serpent's egg in chaos and in the evolving primordial universe. If we read the path in the opposite direction, as a path of transformation then we could deduce that we are faced with the representation of the Iranian transformation of the ancient Mesopotamian dragon in the mythical Semruv.

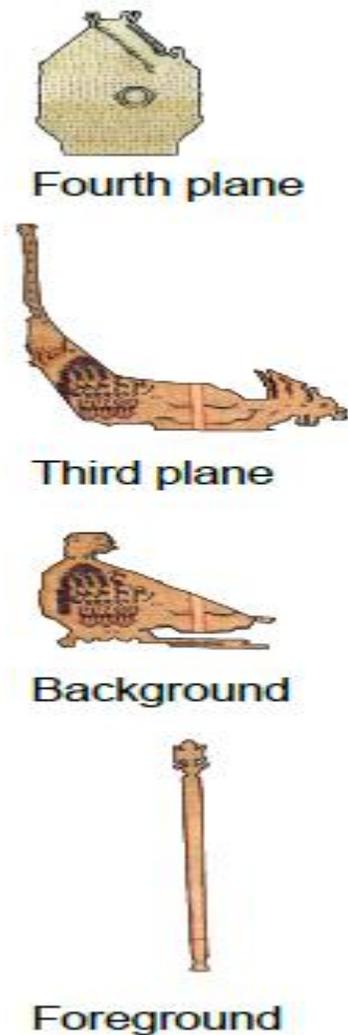


Figure 5: Graphic decomposition for plans of the group of figures placed in the spandrels.

In the space referred to the 4 spandrels are observed 12+4 "objects", 12 of comparable size among them, have a "niche" inside containing three different symbols, the contours of the niche characterized by "lobes". With respect to their axis of vertical symmetry, they have one half coloured red and one half blue: this aspect is also peculiar to this carpet and has not been found in other works examined. The position could have a meaning, in fact it goes from the lower corner, to a quarter of height and finally to half height where is placed the axis of horizontal symmetry and where appears, next to the main object, a fourth smaller object always bicolor, "separate", just below and above the head of the snake a small rooster(?) light blue/blue, which was usually used in carpets to ward off the evil eye. The symmetry of color is maintained in the first two and inverted in the third. Note that each object

is close to or in contact with figures that resemble branches and stalks of plants almost representing its flowers. Inside two of the three niches there is a red symbol shaped like a heart (?) that in some cases has a blue point in the center. (reason and spirit, earthly and divine). It can represent the soul of man on the way to the divine (?) See for example Reza Samvat (1998) with reference to Sufism, the poet Attar previously recalled and the Persian tradition descended from Zoroaster. The meaning of the symbols in the text has some relevance to the carpet we are examining. In particular: "According to the mystical schools there are three levels of human consciousness. These are referred to as:

1. Conscious mind. State of consciousness or existence perceived with the five senses with the help of the faculty of reasoning. This is represented by the

outer square/rectangle, the four corners represent the four cardinal points of the earth (north, south, east and west)

2. Subconscious mind. State of consciousness of the soul. On the way to soul awareness, man goes through four phases of growth and understanding. The inner squares represent the subconscious mind and the four angles are the four stages of consciousness. The subconscious mind or the soul in Sufi poetry is defined as "the Beloved". In esoteric studies, the creation of Adam and Eve is the representation of the creation of subconscious (Adamic) and conscious (Eve) minds.

3. Super conscious mind. State of unity with God. There are two phases of understanding and growth within this mental level. The central drawing represents the super conscious mind. The central drawing is usually alone within a given space. The reason is that the super conscious mind is separated from the rest of the mind. In Gilgamesh's epic Sumerian the mythical bird Imdugud is associated with the tree of life, which gives man immortality: the connection of this bird with the tree of life of Hulupp is considered as a connection to the Garden of Eden. Note that inside the niches there are "shapes" that from bottom to top seem to "join" to give place to the closest to the center that resembles a child.

The golden eagle was a pre-Islamic totem (ongon) of the nomadic Afshar tribes.

CONCLUSION

Ahani L., Yaghoubzadeh A., Vandshoari A. (2017) consider, on the basis of the contents, eight categories for the classification of pictorial carpets of the Qajar era: lyrical, epic, mythical, descriptive, eulogistic, narrative and moral, social and religious. Ackles Sharla F. (1988) indicates some purposes for which the carpets were woven: gift, burial, celebration of material and/or spiritual events (cheerful or painful, hunting scenes, sports victories, wonderful and fantastic nature), status symbol (nobility and dignitaries). Reza Samvat (1998) provides an additional reading key: Persian culture was created by individuals of great intellectual and spiritual strength such as Zarathustra. He knew well his origins, his present and the goals to reach. It is now our responsibility to bring the Torch of Time through the space of our wisdom to keep alive the essence of this ancient culture by understanding it, living it and teaching it to our future generations so that one day they may experience divine love". From the analysis carried out it is possible to attribute the work to some of the categories listed among which: mystical, celebratory both in a material and spiritual, social and

religious sense. It is possible to think that it represents a "gift", but taking into account the high number of "hidden" and symbolic messages it is reasonable to consider this carpet as a work for "initiates" and "defenders" of the millennial religious and cultural traditions of the Iranian people with explicit reference to the followers of Mazdeism.

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