

Afghan Rugs Pattern in a Visual Ethnographic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Carpets are the most important and most famous handicraft item from Afghanistan. There are various patterns of carpet weaving in the provinces of North and Northwest Afghanistan. The development of carpet patterns in Afghanistan is very dynamic. In the past, traditional carpets contained stories, beliefs, and prayers. These patterns have adapted to the social, political, and cultural conditions of the Afghan people. This has led to a change in the Afghan carpet pattern. The problem is how the pattern changes occur, what is behind the changes. This research intends to reveal this problem. The method used is qualitative—data obtained from collecting visual data from carpet artisans. Data grouping consists of traditional and modern visual carpet data, and then the data is analyzed using a visual ethnographic approach. The assumptions made in this study are that the patterns and designs of Afghan rugs that started before the alphabet, until the Afghan war conflict or until now, are caused by the craftsmen's closeness to the problems they face and their life trends, which are influenced by the socio-political conditions of the country. The duration of the war in Afghanistan has affected many things, including the design of the carpet pattern. It can be seen that the patterns of soldiers, helicopters, and weapons are found in the creation of the carpet. This study concludes that this change in pattern occurs due to psychological pressures caused by war. The massive displacement of the Afghan population outside the country, and in the country where they come, has the effect of forming a new pattern. The way a carpet engraver makes a pattern change is by creating a pattern unit, repeating the pattern, and cultivating the pattern organization system. The changes were made as a result of the interpretation process carried out by Afghan carpet craftsmen.

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1. Introduction

Afghanistan is a crucial geostrategic region in the modern world in the early 21st century that maintains its multi-culturalism. The various strands of Afghanistan's cultural history are woven into the different languages and cultures of the various contemporary groups that inhabit the country. Afghanistan's heterogeneity is a cultural heritage that provides a strong foundation for discourse on cultural diversity, reconciliation, and human rights. Heterogeneity is also an essential element of the ongoing reconstruction process and a platform for the nation's future development. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the development of the handicraft-based industry has progressed. However, in the 1970s, the booming carpet weaving industry experienced disruption due to wars and riots [1]. Interestingly, this conflict was able to produce a variety of Afghan carpet motifs or patterns, this can be seen in [Figure 1](#), but on the other hand, it caused millions of Afghans to flee to neighboring countries [2].



Fig. 1. War Rug

Refugees use their skills while in exile to support themselves and their families by continuing their trade-in Iran and Pakistan [3]. In Afghanistan, carpets are an important sector of the creative industry. Afghan rugs are a popular craft in Afghanistan and can boost the country's economy. Historically, the tradition of woven rugs has existed since the time of the moguls. The rugs from Afghanistan used to be called Esfahan, then Khorasan, and now Afghanistan. Traditionally, carpets were made from pure natural raw materials such as wool, spun by hand, and dyes extracted from plants. The high quality and uniqueness of the Afghan rugs form the craft's international reputation [4].

William Charland has researched Afghan rugs. Charland argues, carpet for the people of Afghanistan is an art medium that is profoundly lived; carpet production becomes a medium that permeates their culture. In conditions of war, the people of Afghanistan were able to make Afghan war rugs, and they managed to document the conflict through the media of carpets artificially. Charland's research focuses on educational issues; Charland concluded that art education is useful for broadening students' understanding and empathy for the human condition in its various forms. Charland uses images of weapons and conflict, often censored from art curricula, based on cognitive, aesthetic, and practical growth. Charland argues, however, that this strategy is designed to expose students to the persistence of the art even in the most challenging situations. Charland wants to show his students to see the world in another way, from someone else's perspective [5]. Barnett's research views that oriental carpets are defined as 'flying carpets.' The spread of Afghan carpets occurs through a process of colonial trade and expansion. Carpets are also considered a luxurious wealth, exotic work. Exorcism becomes a traveler's orientation to see and even get a unique cultural "aura." According to Barnett, the oriental rug, the Afghan rug is a story of continuous and unstoppable cross-cultural innovation [6].

Pain's research looks at the meaning of the carpet commodity. According to Pain, carpets have properties influenced by the physical characteristics and meanings attached to the carpet. Besides having functional value, according to Pain, the carpet has a strong social meaning. It can be seen how carpets are used in wedding rituals. The carpet is becoming an essential social ritual in Afghanistan [7]. Eggerman's research sees carpets as works of art that can help restore mental health. Eggerman's study contributed to the recovery of public health due to conflict. Eggerman's study shows that art serves both as a crutch for endurance and a foundation for pain, and highlights the relevance of ethnographic work in identifying what is most important in formulating social health policies to promote a better future [8]. Previous studies have shown the vital role of carpets in Afghan culture but did not provide information on how these patterns developed until new patterns emerged. This research aims to reveal how the new Afghan patterns form and what elements appear in the novelty of these patterns. Are old patterns persistent or changing? Here lies the significance of this study.

2. Method

This research method relies on two sources of information to be analyzed. The source of information was obtained from a thorough study of the existing literature, then conducting in-depth interviews with Afghan carpet artisans, and digging up information from carpet traders. The question posed to the informants is to obtain information on carpet patterns that have been scattered from year to year. Besides that, it will also dig up information on what patterns are currently becoming styles. In the literature review, the researchers collected research reports on the history of Afghan carpets, the development of Afghan carpets, to what the current conditions are. These sources of information provide insight into carpet life in Afghanistan. The rich works of carpet designs from carpet artists in Afghanistan are also reviewed. Primary data collection was carried out through key informant interviews.

3. Results and Discussion

One of the most exotic and distinctive of all oriental rugs is the Shindand or Adraskan in Afghanistan. These rugs are woven in Herat Province, western Afghanistan. The elongated motifs of humans and animals are their hallmarks. Carpets can be sold all over Afghanistan but mainly based in Mazar-e Sharif. Another central Afghan rug is the Baluchi rug, and especially the Baluchi prayer mat. The Baloch people made the rugs of Afghanistan in the southwest. The dyes used come from various vegetables and other natural dyes. Most of the carpet size is medium size. Many patterns and colors are used, but the traditional and most distinctive one is the octagonal (Bukhara) paw print, and often on a red background. Weavers also produced other ornaments of the nomadic lifestyle. The artistic character of the Afghan carpet is subject to the influence of the social and cultural environment. This influence is continuously transmitted from generation to generation. The strong character can be seen in the colors used. These colors represent the various phases of nature. The use of designs and symbols on carpets represents the carpet craftsman's feelings as artistic imagination.

There are many types of Afghan patterns available for knitting and crochet. Interesting patterns for making Afghan patterns, or quilts, can be found on the Internet or at local craft and thread store. These patterns can be sold and used to make carpets. Some of the yarn patterns include Afghan designs. Afghan patterns can produce a single color, one stitched look, or a quilt with multiple stitches and colors. The type of Afghan pattern on a quilt is made from quilt pieces sewn together into one piece. Several crochet or crochet quilt patterns are sewn together to form an Afghan pattern. The Afghan pattern for squares to be made and then sewn is popular because they do convenient handcraft projects for traveling or working in places like a doctor's waiting room. Knitted or crocheted afghan fabrics made of multiple squares allow crafters to practice new stitches without destroying the entire afghan fabric. If squares are not appropriately sewn, squares can be remade before being sewn into the finished quilt. Boxes for afghans can be made from leftover ingredients. A lacy afghan square consisting of a combination of different colors of yarn is called a granny square in crochet. Crochet afghan squares can be made with a lacy or solid stitch pattern. The crochet squares can be positioned as diamonds in an afghan pattern. Some of the afghan crochet patterns for the afghan people consist of a triangle, half a square.

Crochet afghans can be done in one main stitch. There are many crochet and crochet afghan patterns that require the quilt to be made in a single stitch and then embroidered with thread over it to make a flower or other design. This technique is called duplicate embroidery because the idea is to embroider a stitch on the afghan that is very similar to the single stitch used. In crochet, the afghan pattern is made with one crochet stitch, and the embroidery is done with cross-stitch on top. In knitting, the afghan pattern is made by knitting one row and cleaning the next row to make a stockinette stitch before a V-shaped stitch is worked over it. Another way to create a graphic pattern on an afghan for crochet or crochet is to use the single stitch method, but instead of embroidering the finished afghan, each stitch is worked to form the design while the afghan is being sewn. These afghan designs can include animal motifs, intricate garlands, or other decorative possibilities. The Afghan pattern may include instructions for pointed, round, or fringe ends. Afghan patterns can be designed in pastels, bright colors, or neutral shades. Summer afghan fabrics are made from cotton and thin threads, while winter types can be sewn with thicker threads. Baby size afghan patterns are trendy today in classic pastel colors and bright graphic designs. One of the most distinctive features of this class is the generally three-striped border, the center of which consists of ruffled leaf tendrils, spiny stems

partially enclosing a formal rose, and the remaining stripes appear narrow and have some simple wavy tendrils. The colors used are mainly red and blue, with hints of green, yellow, and ivory.

3.1. Analyzing the characteristic of Afghani patterns

1) *Families of shapes*

There are three types of shapes or shapes in the Afghan carpet pattern, namely geometric shapes, abstract shapes, and organic shapes. This family of forms is very much found in oriental rugs, as well as in Persian rugs. The three shape categories we can place for all Persian rug designs are square (sometimes called geometric) designs, curved and floral designs, and visual designs [9]. The curved design has floral motifs and patterns with relatively realistic curved lines and tendrils. They are mostly woven in large cities with a well-established rug industry [10]. Usually, on oriental rugs, many patterns are combined to make a whole. In an oblong plane, there is often a whole loop pattern that is arbitrarily broken by the borders. The plane pattern covers directly, while the boundary pattern is linear. The patterns and colors on Oriental rugs are formed by piles that protrude from the surface of the plain-woven foundation. Carpet designs with common motifs can be found in Central Asian Textiles. Generally, these works are stories from the stories of the people who created and used them. These motifs are mainly displayed on rugs that have multiple functions, namely as chairs, dining tables, beds, but they are also used in clothes and accessories, jewelry, and other household items.

2) *Repetition of quantities*

The afghan pattern has three fundamental elements: units, repetition, and organizational systems, which can be interpreted as curved or square. When taking the definition of a systematic repetition pattern from a unit, then the difference becomes apparent between the design and the pattern. Although the plan possibilities are endless (within the constraints of the medium), the options for repeating structures to form patterns are limited by the laws of mathematical symmetry. The Afghan rug is geometrically patterned, woven with linear elements composed of vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines, and formed by the repetition of the same motif. This carpet motif can be used to determine a specific tribe or place of origin. Such carpet designs can fill an entire area with one repeating motif, known as the 'overarching design' or centered by the dominant medal.

3) *Geometric designs*

Afghan rugs have many designs. Geometric patterns and motifs generally characterize the Turkmen Afghan rugs. It was associated with specific tribes and locations and was part of a distinctive weaving tradition. Until the early 1980s, it was possible to identify carpets with a specific location in northern Afghanistan [7]. Their weaving includes a wide variety of techniques. Their wool rugs have long piles and are colored red, orange, and black in geometric designs (triangles, diamonds, and rectangles), often with ram horns. Some Uzbek rugs are woven into strips measuring about two and a half feet by eight to ten feet. This rug is woven in an asymmetrically tied knot, so it skips an arch rather than being tied to two adjacent arches. The feed-in this rug is behind the row of knots [11].

4) *Colors of the patterns:*

Natural dyes for the manufacture of Afghan carpet colors are still used. However, since the 1950s, previously dyed wool yarns (using synthetic dyes) quickly found in cities and villages are often replaced or combined with natural dyes. The wild colors (some almost colorful) often found on many Afghan rugs are synthetic. In natural dyeing, the threads are pre-soaked in a bath for binding alum, copper sulfate, iron sulfate, lead, or urine. The threads are then transferred to a dye bath and soaked until the desired color is obtained. The wool is then washed and hung to dry. Natural dyes fade beautifully and are often shown as an uneven coloring (abrash). Abrash (meaning mottled or marble) is usually the result of a weaver running out of wool and having to dye another lot or buy a similar color elsewhere.

The meaning of the colors attached to the Afghan rugs has different meanings. Green is a color that is rooted in prosperity, balance, health, and growth. Green, like a vibrant forest and fresh spring leaves, represents rebirth and new opportunities. On Afghan rugs, green is not the most common color, but when it comes up, it is one of the essential features of a design. According to the Koran, Muhammad's favorite color is "emerald green." There are hardly many ordinary Afghan rugs that do not feature a prestigious and sacred color. It is said that luxurious Afghan rugs feature green tones. Green tends to be used more liberally on Persian rugs. Whose color represents hope and a lively and enchanting and invincible force. Double dyed carpet yarns in natural blue and green are standard today. The blue color was initially obtained from the indigo plant; After ancient artisans dyed the wool

blue, it was dyed yellow using the vibrant natural colors of wildflowers such as Saffron and Larkspur. In some places, grape leaves and buckthorn are also used. Paints from the Indigo plant and flower extracts are gathered to produce a glorious green color that is a beautiful tribute to the Prophet Muhammad.

3.2. Meaning of the Colors on Afghani Rugs

Luxurious and intricate Afghan rugs capture historical and artistic details of some of the world's most ancient and influential cultures. The rugs made in today's Afghanistan and including some of the surrounding areas have a symbolic character and message narrative in their motifs. The materials, colors, patterns, and designs of Afghan rugs all tell a unique story and serve as an extraordinary historical testament to their origins. The characteristics, ideals, and emotions generated by colors change over time. In carpet lore, common themes emerge from the mists of history and still inform color choices for designs today. Green is the color associated with the Prophet Muhammad and refers to hope, renewal, and heaven. It is often reserved for parts of the carpet that will not be stepped on very often.

Red brings out happiness, joy, luck, courage, wealth, and a vibrant life force. Blue symbolizes solitude, honesty, strength, or the afterlife. Brown is the color of fertility, a reminder of earth and soil. Yellow suggested sun and was associated with and was often reserved for aristocrats and rulers. White can mean purity and peace or sorrow, and sorrow. Black is robust, can be destructive, and is usually used for outlines and borders, to define the right design. Blue is a calm color designed to give people a sense of inner peace. In many cultures, blue is also strongly associated with trust and loyalty. After red and cream, blue are one of the most common colors used on Afghan rugs, although its history is not easy to trace. Black is an intense color with an equally strong meaning. People tend to associate shade with feelings of darkness. For Afghans, black means death and destruction. Black can be overwhelming in design, so it is not often used on authentic Afghan rugs. There are not many resources in nature that produce blue, so ancient Afghan artisans had to find alternative sources. Blue was initially extracted from the woad plant, but the color did not hold up well and soon faded away. Figure 2 shows the different types of colors used on Afghan rugs and their meanings.

Green	The holy colour of the Prophet Mohammed - it's used sparingly in places least likely to be walked on. Hope, Renewal, Life, Spring
Red	Beauty, Wealth, Courage, Luck, Joy, Faith
Blue	Power or Force, Solitude - Allusion to the After Life
Orange	Humility and Piety
Yellow	The Sun, Joy of Life
White	Purity, Cleanliness
Black	Usually only found in outlines. Mourning, Destruction
Gold	Power, Wealth
Brown	Fertility

Fig. 2. The meaning colors in Afghan rugs

3.3. Afghan Carpet Design Elements

In fine arts, a motif is the repetition of an idea, pattern, image, or theme. In textile art, motifs (also called blocks or squares) are smaller elements in a much larger piece. Motifs can come in various sizes, but usually, all the motifs in work are the same size. The patterns and stitches used in a motif can vary widely. However, there are usually some unifying elements, such as texture, stitch pattern, or color, that give the final result an aesthetic appeal. The design includes a recurring theme of events or objects, sometimes referred to as elements of a set. These elements repeat for sure. The loop can be a template or model that can produce something or part of an item, especially if the items created have enough similarities to the basic pattern to be concluded.

In textiles, printing is the application of color to fabrics in a specific pattern or design. Textile printing is related to dyeing, but on the contrary, in proper coloring, the entire fabric is uniformly

covered with one color; in printing, one or more colors are applied to them only in specific parts, and in a sharply defined pattern. Elements are components or parts, which can be isolated and defined in any visual design or artwork. They are structures that carry messages of all kinds. This includes points or marks, lines, shapes, spaces, colors, and textures. Geometric patterns and motifs generally characterize Afghan rugs. It was associated with specific tribes and locations and was part of a distinctive weaving tradition. Until the early 1980s, it was possible to identify carpets with specific areas in northern Afghanistan. However, increasingly, and particularly in the case of Chob Rang, designs have been made overseas, undermining the development of local patterns. Here are the elements of Afghan carpet design.

1) Symmetry

Symmetry is a fundamental organizing principle in nature and culture. Symmetry analysis makes it possible to understand the organization of a pattern and determine invariance and change. The symmetry and patterns in rug weaving are influenced by the construction and placement of individual knots. The knots, arranged in a repeating order, form a pattern with the corresponding dots of colored thread. If the vertices are placed in a different color than expected, or a specific color appears in an incorrect location, it results in a breakdown of symmetry. Asymmetrical knot goes around the warp thread pair, thus tying it from above, extending from both sides down, and passing up again between the warp thread pairs. The asymmetric knot gives more than a pair of warp threads in such a way that one warp is entirely closed, while the second half of the knot covers the other warp on only three sides, the upper quarter of the free warp thread. The thread surrounded on all four sides may lie on the right or the left, and this difference gives us two different types, the one in Figure 3 flows As1, As 2 [12].

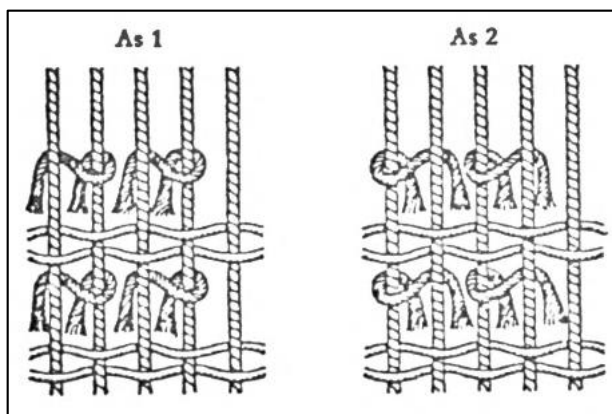


Fig. 3. Symmetrical knot

Tapestry technology is more accessible than other textile technologies [13]. Because the colors, designs, and patterns are all brought about by the pile of carpets with a two-dimensional nature. Other woven textile structures produce patterns in which three-dimensional properties must be taken into account mathematically. Pattern-woven textiles, in general, represent technology in which the repetition that forms the way is done mechanically. In mechanical repetition, a breakdown of symmetry is achieved repeatedly only through weaving errors when setting up the loom. Thus, the patterns on hand-knitted rugs offer a unique possibility for studying two-dimensional patterns in art. They represent mathematical concepts related to number theory and pattern theory, which carpet makers can understand intuitively [14].

2) Spiral

Spirals are lines, intricate curves, and curves of various planes depicting decorations and inscriptions, see Figure 4. This spiral design can be seen on Afghan Tapestries and is most often found on borders, in the middle of a rug that gives elegance and beauty to the rug. The types of spirals are Allover Spiral, Interconnected Spiral, Broken Spiral, Medallion Spiral, Dragon mouths. The genotype of the Afghan rug is a tree-like string structure, with each line depicting a spiral, and the tree representing a connected spiral. The roots of this tree are the first spirals starting at one corner of the central medallion. Each string consists of the corresponding circle attribute. The most significant characteristic of these attributes is that although they describe the geometry of our design elements in a comprehensive manner, they must comply fully with strict design rules [9].

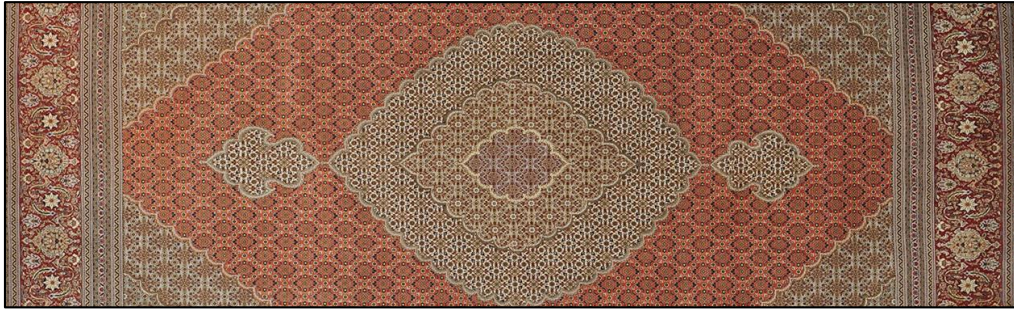


Fig. 4. Spiral pattern and curved design

3) *Chaos*

As mentioned above, the Afghan patterns and designs on rugs and rugs are inspired by nature, religion, myth. Since many people have experienced a bad situation in Afghanistan due to decades of war, it has hurt society. This dire situation can be seen in the design of the rugs they make. The earliest rugs called "war rugs" appeared after the soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 [1]. According to the often speculative literature on the subject, the war rug is thought to have originated near Herat in northwest Afghanistan. Most likely, they were woven by members of tribal groups with a long tradition of carpet weaving. Many war rugs are associated with Baluch [15], for example, the ethnically diverse nomadic groups that occupy large areas on both sides of the Afghanistan-Iran border. Baluch rugs are known for their striking geometric designs, grim palette [16]. The earliest war rugs were an inventive variation on traditional designs, see Figure 5. Made in Afghanistan, has several edging designs consistent with old rugs, some ribbons containing chained S shapes, and flowers. The center plane, alternatively, is patterned with a repeating array of elements; traditional flowers, vases, birds, and animals, and introduced the first motifs inspired by Soviet tanks, helicopters, and weapons. The arrangement, scale, and simplification of war imagery suggest that these early war rug designs were based on memory rather than on paper.



Fig. 5. The last king of Afghanistan on the rug

4) *Waves*

Nature is always the best beauty inspiration. Artists are always inspired by seeing the point. Geometric waves are another piece of Persian rug elements inspired by waves of water or rivers that enhance the uniqueness and beauty. These waves are usually used in hair ornament borders or full waves, containing a field on the mat. Water running on an Afghan carpet is a distinctive border pattern, see Figure 6. All carpet weaving communities in Afghanistan use water as an indispensable element, and this is associated with the life itself. The water element pattern appears as a triangular, saw blade, or wave pattern (and is sometimes labeled 'saw' or 'mountain'); it makes for a simple yet elegant border design. The pattern is found on carpets owned by nearly all tribes in Afghanistan, from Anatolian to the Caucasus to the Persians. However, the difficulty lies in differentiating it from other similar patterns, such as the dog running and zigzag motif.



Fig. 6. Water motif flowing over the border

The running dog pattern Famous in classical architecture, the running dog, is a decorative motif consisting of a stylized, repetitive roll shape, somewhat like the profile of a breaking wave, see [Figure 7](#).



Fig. 7. Running dog pattern above

Meander (also known as Greek key) is a decorative pattern drawn in continuous lines and formed into repeating geometric motifs. Its name comes from the River Meander in western Turkey, which was known in ancient times for its many twists and turns. This pattern is also known as the "Greek lock" pattern because it was widely used in ancient Greece in architectural decoration and earthen pottery. Its shape is reminiscent of simple teeth or locks, see [Figure 8](#).



Fig. 8. The meander border on the rug

4. Conclusion

The aesthetic value of Afghan carpets is measured based on regional and ethnic identifications, while design, color, and structure considerations are elements that enhance their aesthetic appeal. The rug as a symbol of the ideals and philosophy of life; its existence is an integral part of the history, culture, and religion of the people who weave it. There are three essential pattern elements in the Afghan carpet: the pattern unit, repetition, and organizational system, which can be interpreted in a curved or square way. Afghan motifs such as bold medals, spandrels, repeating arabesques, dramatic borders, often use a repeating pattern and a Herat flower centered within a diamond, with four curved leaves that resemble a fish coming out of each diamond. Besides, conflict conditions also influence the formation of design patterns. Knott, Chaos, and Turbulence came along with the war to see many

rugs featuring visuals of soldiers, helicopters, and weapons. The geometric waves of Persian tapestries are also inspired by the waves of water or rivers, which enhance the uniqueness and beauty of the tapestries, and these waves are usually used at the border of a rug or full-wave, which contains the plane of the rug. It can be concluded that Afghan Carpets and Rugs are mostly handwoven. Hence these rug design works do not have standard features.

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