

Iconographic and Semiotic Study of Tabriz and Azerbaijan Carpet based on Shamanism

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ABSTRACT

Since the dawn of human civilization, art has served as a reflection of humanity's relationship with the world, transforming inspiration from nature and belief into symbolic expression. According to the science of semantics, understanding art requires uncovering the meanings behind these symbols. Among the most distinguished artistic traditions of Azerbaijan and Tabriz is carpet weaving—an art form rich with symbolic motifs that reflect ancient spiritual and cultural beliefs. This study explores the iconography and semiotics of Tabriz and Azerbaijani carpets, focusing on the influence of shamanistic beliefs rooted in early Turkic traditions. In shamanism, the cosmos revolves around the Polar Star, the seat of the deity Ulgen, often symbolized by a four- to eight-pointed star. This motif, frequently called the “sun” in carpet design, embodies the sky god Tengri, who breathes life into humanity. The famous Tabriz Fish pattern represents the earth-protecting fish of shamanic cosmology, oriented northward, with dual fish surrounding an octagonal world. Diamond motifs symbolize the North Star—the dwelling of Ulgen—and are also referred to as the “Mother” design, evoking creation and fertility. Floral motifs and numerical patterns carry cosmological meanings: six petals denote divine blessings, while three flowers symbolize the seeds of the Tree of Life, connecting the underworld, the earthly realm, and the heavens. Through iconographic and semiotic analysis, this paper reveals how Tabriz and Azerbaijani carpets embody shamanistic cosmology, myth, and spirituality—serving as woven talismans that preserve ancient beliefs and cultural identity.

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Introduction

Mythology

Myth is the key to accessing the spiritual power of mankind and a search for its meaning and experience (Campbell as cited in Barthes, 1972). Whenever a person cannot use verbal information to explain and interpret a phenomenon, they turn to mythmaking in order to be able to convey a meaningful experience (Campbell, 1949, 2023). In this case, hunting seemed to be a sign, a sign of food, a provider of food, and a factor for growth. In this way, the myth cleanses the sins related to hunting animals. The first myths were formed with animal themes (Campbell, 1949). Animals have always been respected, and these beliefs have also been formed about the plant world. Animals like deer became guides for humans. The visible celestial forces, the sun, the moon, and the five celestial spheres, led to astronomy and the regulation of society in harmony with the seasons, and an understanding of the universal order. This period also marked the beginning of a period of interest in philosophy for humans. Following the emergence of the Mesopotamian urban culture, hunters gradually turned to herding, and nomadic herders turned to primitive forms of agriculture. The hunter believed that one must either kill or be killed, while the farmer believed in natural longevity. In this way, man was initially influenced by the characteristics of the animal world, then by plants, and finally by humans. This is reflected in forms such as clothing, architecture, equestrian equipment, and funerary objects, such as the jewelry of the Saka Turks and the artifacts of the Azerbaijani Mannaea kingdom.

Semiotics

Semiotics has a subtle connection with myth. Semiotics is the science of studying signs. This science was introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure. Merton and Kendall (1949) believe that a true symbol does not refer to anything other than itself. This symbol has a structure that brings us closer to the inner meaning of life and reality. Through symbolism, we find connection to the existential self and to other people and to God. Durkheim (2002) tried to discover the meaning of religious signs and symbols through sociology. They believed that the primary forms of social classification were the first stages of social hierarchy. With this social order and classification, humans were divided by the rules of totemism and re-aligned themselves.

Totemism

Totemism (Durkheim, 2002) is the existence of a kind of kinship between human groups through a mysterious relationship. A totem refers to an object, sign, or symbol, depending on whether it is an animal or a plant, denoting family or tribal lineage. When humans use these symbols through crafts and textiles to express their social and emotional needs, they demonstrate this mysterious intervention. In fact, these totems create relationships and act as a family and tribal symbol. These

crafts with these symbols, which are created by man, are also placed in a higher position than philosophy. Man has the ability to transform his surrounding environment. These impacts and transformations are created by man and his artifacts. This transformation is expressed through symbolic or simulated images. These images are conveyed by visible, tactile, and audible objects.

Oriental carpets are one of these symbols that give material form to human minds. In the life of nomadic people, there are symbols of animals and plants, but in shepherds and farmers, these symbols take on a linear form, and the mysterious intervention of nature and the decline of myth mean that there has been a movement from enlightenment to logical thinking.

Pictograms, ideograms, and iconography

Cave drawings may serve to record some events, but they are not a linguistic message. They are normally part of a tradition of pictorial art. When some pictures came to represent particular images consistently, it is a kind of picture writing or pictograms. This symbol ☀ may be used to refer to the sun. If a symbol like ☞ is used for heat, daytime, as well as sun, we are dealing with an ideogram. The more pictorial ones are pictograms, and the more abstract one is ideogram. They are words or sounds. An iconography is a particular range or system of types of images used by an artist or artists to convey particular meanings. For example, in Christian religious painting, there is an iconography of images such as the lamb, which represents Christ, or the dove, which represents the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, iconography focuses on objects and persons, but ideogram focuses on ideas and concepts (Yule, 1996).

Shamanism

Shamanists believe that by contacting spirits, one can diagnose and treat illness and suffering, or cause illness and suffering in individuals (Clewlow, 2023; Leondorf and Douglass, 1997; Sharon, 1974, 1978). From this perspective, shamanism, like the rite of the wilderness, is a method of witchcraft. The ability to predict the future is another belief among shamanists. Religious leaders who know and practice shamanistic traditions are called shamans. Shamans claim that they can travel with their souls to other worlds and contact other spirits. They believe that by doing so, they are able to establish balance and communication between the material and spiritual worlds (Aghaei, 2021).

The basic elements of shamanism were Gok Tanri (Great God), Moon, Earth, Water, Father (Supreme Ancestor), and Fire (ojaq). The Gok Turks made their gods out of felt and kept them in a leather bag. The Huns called them Idul, the Altai people called them Tuz or Tos, the Yakuts or the Saka Turks called them Tangara, the Soyuts called them Oran or Eren, and the Mongols called them Ongun, which was actually an idol. The skulls of sheep and horses sacrificed to the gods were mounted on thin sticks. According to the Saka Turks, man was created by a being that came from

the sky; half of his body was in the form of a man, and the other half in the form of a horse. According to the Turks, to create man, the Altai god (Ulgen) ordered a person who was next to him to bring a handful of soil from the depths of the water. In some Turkic beliefs, the first man grew like a fruit from the branch of a sacred tree (Inan, 2021). Ulgen created three large fish and placed the earth behind them. He placed two fish on either side of the earth and one in the middle. The head of the middle fish is facing north. Shamans believe that one day life on earth will end, and that day is called *Kalganchi Chag*, which means eternal time. The Oren Kazakh and Kyrgyz people offered milk and buttermilk to the gods on the first day of spring in the *Sachi*, a kind of offering ceremony. To reach Ulgen, the shaman must pass through seven, and in some versions, nine, obstacles. Ulgen is married and has seven sons and nine daughters. Umay or Humay is a divine bird in the form of a bird, the protector of women and children, and if its shadow falls on someone, they become the king of the world or become very rich (Inan, 2021). On the drum of *Qaams/shaman*, images of the sun, the thunder star, and the tree of life can be seen. They believe that when we were born from our father Ulgen, two Qaeen trees (a holy tree in shamanism) descended from the sky to earth with our mother Umay. The Yakuts, or Saka Turks, also consider the pine tree sacred. In the legends of the Uyghur Turks, it is said that their khagans were created from trees. There are signs of birth from trees regarding the origin of the Qibchaq people. When Oghuz Khan was returning from war, the wife of one of his soldiers gave birth to a son inside a hollow tree trunk. Oghuz Khan adopted him and named him Qibchaq (tree hollow).

In the Azerbaijani stories of Malik Muhammad, the daughters who married the princes in the story were also created from apple trees. The Altai and Yakut Turks believe that fire produced by flint is sacred and is called *iyi ot*, meaning holy fire (Inan, 2021). In their prayers, the Altai call fire something that is separated from the sun and moon and believe that fire is sent by God, Ulgen. Divination by looking at fire has been an ancient custom among the Turks. Turkish rulers would light a fire on a certain day, pray for it, and make sacrifices. If the flames were green, it was a sign of a rainy year and abundant crops. Red fire symbolized war, yellow fire symbolized illness, and black color meant a long journey and the ruler's illness. If the fire whistled, it was a sign of a traveler coming from afar. The whistling of the fire at night meant the coming of Aza (the devil) (Aghaei, 2021). Shamanists believed that fire cleanses everything and drives away evil spirits. The sanctity of fire is not separate from the sanctity of the family hearth. In the *Sari-Arka Naiman* tribes, they paid homage to an *Ulgen-evi /ulu ev* (holy house). This house or tent was called the *Qara-Changaran*, which was a tent that had been blackened by the smoke of a fireplace for hundreds of years. A promise made in this tent was considered an oath. Brides pay homage to the fire and the hearth, bow and prostrate themselves before the hearth, and the oath is taken in front of the hearth and the fire. In the *Kashgari dictionary*, the rituals of the *Qaams/Shamans* are called *Arvish*. After the Turks converted to Islam, the shamans wrote their prayers on amulets. The Uyghur Buddhists and Babylonian sorcerers, who were enemies of Zoroastrianism, called the shaman */Qaam*

(Lindholm, 1997). The shaman/qaam/bakhshi, in the shamanist belief, has the power to mediate between humans and gods and spirits. Humans are powerless to deal with evil spirits, and they cause illness in humans and animals, requiring a telo/telug (sacrifice). Anyone who wants to become a shaman must take a course with an experienced shaman to teach them the incantations, and family members will hold a Qaam Bakshi Toi ceremony for them. Members of the Yakut Turks' family, dressed in komo robes, go up the mountain and hand the Qaam a staff with a horse's mane tied to it. On his right side, there are nine young boys, on his left side, there are nine girls, and in the middle stands an old shaman. And he promised to be a shaman. They swear to worship God and help the needy. They release a seabird for a god and sacrifice a cow with red, white, and black colors for diseases. Then they perform a symbolic prayer for the beheading of the first shaman by his son. It is as if the severed head is mounted on an iron rod and watches over the whole world. The ceremony lasts nine days. During the ceremony, goats and sheep are sacrificed, young boys and girls dance, and shamans read fortunes and tell the future. On the ninth day, the young shaman is lifted into the air on a felt mat. He is now a real shaman. The shaman's perception is very high from childhood and is imprinted on the shaman's drum in the form of a rainbow (Inan, 2021). Shamans have a guardian spirit or twin and fly with the help of a falcon, a hawk, a dove, or a deer. The Yakut Turks believe that the soul of the Qaam is attached to the branches of the sacred tree of (Iyik Mas) in the sky. When the Qaam is still in the mother's womb, the soul in that tree comes to earth and penetrates the body of the new Qaam. The Uyghurs also call the shaman "Buddha" and the Turkmen "Burkhan". The qaam/shaman has a robe, a drum, and a cymbal (Tonbek), the shape of which is determined by the spirit or spirits that patronize the shaman. The robe should not have more than thirty pieces, but in practice, there are sixty different pieces, which are made by the chaste women of the family. The upper part is made of the skin of a gazelle or a white sheep, the other pieces symbolizing the beings that the shamans see in their imaginations while traveling in the spirit world. Nine little dolls represent the nine daughters of Ulgen, and their ornaments, such as a small bow, represent the spiritual bows and arrows for fighting evil spirits. Frogs or snakes represent the whispers of evil spirits in the moon, sun, and stars, which are displayed as pieces of cloth and hanging ornaments (Lindholm, 1997). The shaman's hat is made of red cloth three cubits long with three loops on the sides. The hat has three sable skins and is called an och oyeh lo qush boruk (three-knotted chicken hat). Strings of beads in each row of five beads are the tips of which are the heads of snakes (snail or persimmon skin). The number of rows is five, nine, or sixteen. Two braids of sirma (golden or silver thread) are sewn on the hats, knotted in nine places, and form a rainbow shape. The top is sewn in a zigzag shape from white sheep wool. A picture of a flying bird is painted on the neck, and the top of the hat is narrower, and two, nine, or thirty owl feathers are sewn to the sides. The Kyrgyz and Kazakh Bakshi called the shaman's drum a qupuz, and until the post-Islamic period, the ashiks who continued the shamanic path considered the qupuz sacred (Inan, 2021). If the Yakut shamans could not find a drum, they used a horse's tail. The drum is

made in the shape of a circle, oval, or egg from a forest tree, such as acacia or cedar. After it is made, it is placed between two mountain cypress, and wine is offered in honor of the spirits. After the death of the shaman, his drum is cut into pieces and tied to a tree, and the shaman is buried under that tree. The tokhmaq or wooden hammer of the drum is also made of acacia wood or deer antler. Some shamans/Bakhshis of Turkestan also play the daf, tonbak, rabab, and setar in addition to the drum. The two circles in the Drum symbolize the moon and the sun. The thick line in the shape of an arc symbolizes the rainbow. The Cayenne tree and the deer, from whose skin the drum is made, are depicted on the Drum, along with images of the ancient Qaam, stars, celestial and demonic spirits, and sacrificed animals, along with the performance of religious ceremonies.

The Turks had important festivals in spring and summer. The first festival of spring was called Urus Sara (the month of the arrival of the herds for grazing) and was celebrated on the 28th of August. The Bashqurd tribe celebrated the spring festival without men, called Qarqa Toy, and fed the crows with millet and milk. All ceremonies were accompanied by animal sacrifices. Bloodless sacrifices were called sachi, or offerings, which included yalma (pieces of cloth tied to the shaman's drum or tree), tus, or feeding for the ungun (oil to lubricate their mouths and sprinkling oil and wine on the fire), and the release of animals as offerings to the spirits (iduk). Shamanism is a matriarchal religion. After the beginning of the patriarchal era, the animal-shaped onguns were replaced by human-shaped idols of unguns. In nomadic tribes, milk, oil, and wheat; in agricultural tribes, wheat, barley, and wine; and among merchants, money is used as a sachi. Male animals are used for sacrifice, and their bones are burned or buried. The Mid-Autumn Festival was held to protect against evil spirits. The shaman, while ascending, sings a special hymn at each level of the sky and stops at special places called podak. For the ascent, they choose a tent and plant a kayin/holy tree in its center. The trunk of the tree is scratched in nine places, which are called tapti, meaning ladder and step (Aghaei, 2021). The door of the tent opens towards the east. In front of the door, they built a nest as a symbol of a manger and a trap with a horse's mane. They bring several white and gray horses for sacrifice. The shaman calls out the name of the god Ulgen and then his sons. He addresses Karshit Bey, the owner of the three ladders and the son of Ulgen. The shaman symbolizes the flight to the sky on the mummified goose. If the sacrifice is for Ulgen, the head is placed towards the east, and if for Erlik, the head of the sacrifice is placed towards the west. The owner of the sacrifice brings nine pieces of clothing and hangs them by the door. These are offerings to Ulgen, called tolu. The shaman embraces the owners of the sacrifice with his drum. And he says, "Evil spirits, return the way you came." The shaman takes the gifts of the Ulgen and symbolizes the ascension to heaven (Lindholm, 1997). On the first floor, with thunder and lightning, on the second floor, the spirit of the sacrificed animal; on the third floor, he rides a goose and predicts the weather. On the fourth floor, he symbolizes the roaring sky with his drum. On the fifth floor, there is a powerful creator. The shaman plays a drum at her bedside in a soft voice and sings a song. This spirit is female and calls her mother. At this stage, everyone throws their hats

under the shaman's drum to bring them good luck. On the sixth floor, he prostrates himself before the moon, and on the seventh floor, he prostrates himself before the sun. He goes up to the 12th floor of the sky and offers the sacrifice to Ulgen and recites a prayer. On his way back, he drops the drum, opens his eyes, and greets everyone as if he had come from afar. After the Islamic period, the Bakshis/Bakhshis used the word Pari Khan or Fatima Anna as their patron and supporter. Shamans try to transfer disease from humans to animals or elements. Dolls are used for this ritual. A collar, which is a rope folded two or three times, is tied with one end to the roof and the other end to the ground with a nail. They tie gold and green cloth and elderberry branches to it and say that it has come from Gabriel for Fatima Anna. They place a container full of water. They place a mirror and a candle in front of it. They throw a peach pit into the fire. They use the charcoal to paint the child's palms and eyes. They put a ring, a needle, and some cotton in the water. Sometimes a small stick is placed in the water for the fairy to sit on, and the bakshi says a prayer. In another case, to cure an illness, the shaman holds a sword. There are bell-shaped rings between the hilt and the blade. At the beginning of the ritual, the bakshi sticks the sword or dagger into a wall next to the hearth. The shaman stood at the hearth and prayed. After a while, he put down the sword and whip. He put fennel seeds in his mouth. After praying, he burned them on hot coals. At the same time, the daf woman began to beat the daf and pray. The shaman danced, holding the sword and whip in his right hand and a container full of smoke in his left, bowed his head three times in front of a candle, and threw the container full of smoke. He fainted, and one of the participants in the ritual grabbed him from behind. They made a headband with three flags in white, red, and gray, and 51 white dolls and 61 blue dolls. The playing of the instrument stopped, and Bakshi plunged his sword into the wall and began to drive away the jinn with his whip, and the first part of the ceremony was over. The next day, the musicians put their tambourines/daf in front of the fire and dried them. Bakshi sits between the hoop and the hearth, his head bowed, meditating, the whip in his hand swinging left and right, then swinging the whip over the patient. The musicians begin to play the instruments again and sing prayers. Bakshi, holding a bowl of smoke, dances and throws out the coals. He took two dolls, then, muttering a prayer, held them to the flame of a candle and set them on fire. Then, bringing the burning dolls close to the patient's face, he threw them into the fire. He went to the pigeons and then the goat and made them circle around the patient. He held a dagger in his hand and pretended to plunge it into the patient's body. On the evening of the third day, the drummers played the drums and the singers sang religious songs. The Bakshi danced around the circle. They prepared 41 sticks, each one arshin (70 centimeters) long. The Bakshi lit the dolls with a candle flame and moved them over the patient's head. Meanwhile, a woman spectator began to dance. The Bakshi cut the 41 sticks in two and moved them over the patient's body. He gave two sticks to the five men who were standing by the fire. They also circled around the rope and returned the sticks to Bakshi. Then, with a gesture as if he were trying to drive away the jinn, he attacked the door with his sword. In other places, sand, an astrolabe, a white chicken

with a black head, and forty pieces of oiled bread were also used (Seykin, 2000). In other ceremonies, water was brought from seven springs and seven mills, passed through a turtle skeleton, and the patient was washed. If he did not recover, they would prepare food for the spirits in the form of lizards, frogs, and snakes, some of which they would eat, and the rest would be left outside the house at a crossroads. In his prayers, the shaman sometimes asks for help from the spirit of the sun, who lives in the southern forests on nine hills, and the mother, the owner of the eight-sided land. The shamans of the Yakut people use a spoon and burning horsehair and a cross (the symbol of Oz) and constantly repeat the word Oroï (Amen). The eagle is sacred to the shaman because the flapping of its wings melts the ice in the spring. In some ceremonies, the leaves are also used because the Ihist Khatoon is the spirit of the goddess who likes the leaves. An oath is taken to the eagle, and it is obligatory to feed the eagle. Killing the eagle causes illness, and for the cure, a horse with white spots must be sacrificed. God gave the supreme ancestor of the Turks a magical stone called Yada/Yeda/Sata/Jade/Jay, so that they could use it to create rain, snow, hail, and storms whenever they wanted. This stone was in the possession of the great Turkic Qams and commanders, and is still in the possession of the Qams and magicians (Aghaei, 2021). Shamans can use this stone to make it rain and, in summer, snow. This stone is a living object and resembles a human head. Its face, eyes, ears, and mouth are clearly visible. If the hands and eyes of a woman or a stranger touch it, the stone dies and its effect is lost. Altai shamans lose all their wealth to reach the windy mountain where this stone is. The stone shaman asks for rain from Qayra Khan and introduces himself as the root of a cedar tree. In Anatolia, they write a prayer for rain on 41 stones and throw them into the water. Young people who are about to get married go with their horses to the shaman, who sprinkles fermented milk around the horses, mentions the names of forty evil spirits, and supplicates to a god called Itik/Idik. The girl's consent to the marriage is given by giving the boy a ring or a handkerchief. Then the young man's friends make a room without a door with branches and bushes, and the bride and groom stay there for three days, lighting the fire with flint. The Kypchak Turk bride pours oil into the fire of her father-in-law's house and prostrates. In other Turkic regions that have converted to Islam, this custom has disappeared, and the bride pays homage to the spring, river, or lake from which her father-in-law draws water by sprinkling silver. It is performed with a female shaman and is called Sugosterme/Hokurondurme. Sprinkling Shabash on the bride's head is a central element of shamanism. The Yakut Turks ask God for many children, especially boys. The shaman prays to the goddess Isit Khatun, or the owner of the sacred horse herds. Women who are unable to bear children ride under the sacred tree on a white-gray horse and cry and pray. In Kyrgyz tribes, sacred trees during shamanism are the graves of ancestors and great shamans, which in the Islamic period became the tombs of the saints of Allah (Seykin, 2000). During childbirth, they make noise to prevent the womb from being possessed by Alqarisi/Albasti. Shamans see the evil spirit Abasti in the form of a yellow goat/girl. She takes the liver of the child. Albasti is afraid of blacksmiths and people who have iron and the color red. The umbilical cord of

the child is buried, and a little food is given as a gift to Umay Ana. And they cook a meal from wheat flour. The Turks called the soul and spirit Tin. The Hun Turks would put their dead in coffins lined with gold, silver, or wool, and hundreds of people would be killed along with the dead. In Chinese sources describing the Tang Dynasty, the Gok Turk would put the dead in a tent, walk around the tent seven times, cut their faces with a knife, and cry. Then, they would burn the dead body with the horse they were riding and all their belongings. The ashes of the dead would be buried. On the walls of the building built over the grave, they would draw pictures of the deceased and the wars in which they had participated. If the deceased had killed someone during his lifetime, they would place a stone on the grave; there would be a hundred to a thousand of these stones. After sacrificing horses and sheep, their heads would be mounted on a peg. The Gok Turks placed carved wooden effigies of those they had killed on their graves to help them in heaven. The Kuman Kypchaq people built high mounds on their graves and placed statues on them (Seykin, 2000). The statues faced east. The rich built pyramid-shaped houses on their graves. There are Balbals (stone statues) on the graves, for which people make sacrifices and keep their mouths greased. Fermented milk is placed on the graves. In some tribes, the bones and objects of the dead are broken and buried because they believe that if they are not broken, the broken objects will be given to him, and the head of the dead is buried facing east. For three days, the whole family stays in the house of the deceased and throws some food and rocks on the fire. Seven days after the burial, the family goes to the cemetery, lights a fire, and throws some food and rocks on the fire. The dead shaman is placed on four wooden poles alone. In the Neolithic period, the children of dead mothers or women whose husbands had died were also killed and buried. Some Turks also hung the body from a tree. Whenever old women got sick, they would take food and drink and put it on their husband's grave. They would say, "Eat and drink and don't harm us." In addition to the 7th day, food is also given on the 20th day after death. A statue of Balbal is placed near the Yug, which is the food of charity for the deceased. The Turks of Turkestan believed that the dead would come to their homes once a year, and anyone who heard the sound would die at this time. Wearing black clothes, cutting the hair, a black and blue flag, and cutting the tail of the deceased horse and hanging it from a thin stick were signs of mourning at home, although the Kazakhs wore white. During a great war, the Turks would also cut the tail of their horses to show their devotion, which was an insult to the enemy (Aghaei, 2021). There are several studies about art in Iranian context (Babapour, et al., 2026; Farzaneh et al., 2024; Yusefnejad, 2025). However, there are no studies on connecting pictogram, iconography and shamanism with each other. Therefore, this study tries to relate the symbols of carpet into shamanistic beliefs.

2. Methodology

Descriptive and library methods have been used to study this article.

3. Results



Figure 1. Azerbaijani carpets and kilims.

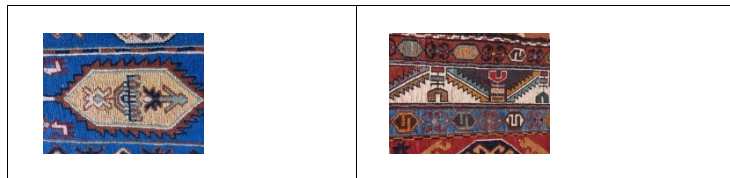
Three Azerbaijani carpets with a diamond shape in the middle.

The diamond-shaped symbol of the star of Ulgen is the place of the creator god of the Turks in shamanism, which is represented either as a diamond, a swastika (Oz symbol in shamanism), a four-pointed star, or an eight-pointed star.



Figure 2. Azerbaijani Kilim (Shahseven)

Birds and animals are used as sacrifices in shamanism, and in addition to guiding the souls of humans; they help the shaman protect them from evil spirits. In the middle of the carpet, there is also the shape of the house of Ulgen.



Two designs from the Verni of Azerbaijan with signs resembling the letter s, symbolizing the dragons that protect the heavens and the courts of the gods, and the shaman must defeat them while ascending to the heavenly levels to reach the presence of Ulgen Khan, the god of the twelfth heaven, located in the star Ulgen.



A carpet with the symbol of a ram's horn, which in shamanism is used to guide the human soul to the other world, and ram's horns are also visible on the tombstones of Turks. Among Turkmen, having a ram's hairstyle and braiding women's hair on the side of the head is also a manifestation of this belief.



Figure 3. Azerbaijani Kilim (Shahseven)

It is a sample rug with symbols of the tree of life, protection, abundance, and animals used for sacrifice in shamanism.

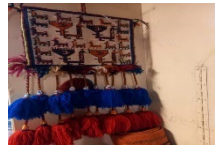


Figure 4. Azerbaijani Kilim

Azerbaijani kilim with motifs of birds and animals sacrificed in shamanistic rituals.

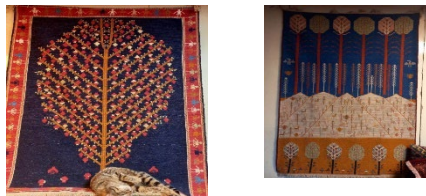


Figure 5. Azerbaijani Kilim (Shahseven).

The pattern of the tree of life in front of the Ulgen Palace which is used by shamans as a symbol in shamanistic rituals and during healing and ascension ceremonies. The pomegranate is a symbol of the sun in shamanistic rituals.



Figure 6. Azerbaijani verni

Verni with the symbol of three eight-pointed circles inside symbols resembling space creatures (three circles together are also considered the seeds of the tree of life). In the shamanism religion, the world has an octagonal shape. There are three worlds: the underworld, the world in which we live, and the world to which we will go after death. Special animals for sacrifice are also seen in the design.

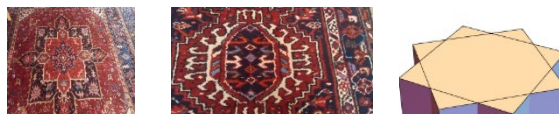


Figure 7. Heriz carpet from Azerbaijan.

In the middle image, there is an eight-pointed star in the middle of the carpet. The carpet designers consider it to be the sun and the others to be the divine court, and the author of this article considers it to be the polar star, the residence of Ulgen Khan, the creator of man, which is surrounded by dragons. In addition, the world in shamanism has an eight-sided shape. Also, during the Sassanid period, the people of Azerbaijan, who had been forced to convert to Zoroastrianism, left this religion and called themselves Zarvani. These are the makers of backgammon boards who used two dice and predicted the future on the board by throwing them. The image of these two-cube dice on top of each other is the eight-pointed star in the middle of the Tabriz and Heriz carpets. The image on the right shows the turtle symbol, which in shamanism represents the earth and is the shaman's connection to the sky, and drives away evil spirits. In the middle of the turtle symbol, the North Star, the location of Ulgen, and the dragons that protect the divine court can be seen. (Taken from the explanations of Mr. Talari, a merchant and carpet designer from Tabriz)



Figure 8. Azerbaijani carpet

The carpet has both the symbol of the Tree of Life and the Ulgen Star, indicating the location of the God of Goodness. In the stages of shamanism, the shaman symbolically climbs this Tree of Life to reach the palace of Ulgen Khan.

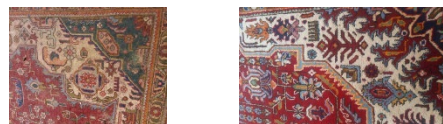


Figure 9. Tabriz carpet

Two images of the Lachak section of the Tabriz carpet, full of symbols of shamanism. In the Lachak section, this T-shaped sign is the symbol of fire, which, next to the tree of life, is the necessary material for the shaman for ascension and healing. There are signs  in the Tabriz carpet that symbolize the birth of a female human being, and the head of the mother or female being is shown as a diamond, the star of Ulgen, the place of Ulgen Khan. And it shows the godlike position and totem of the mother and woman, that the mother, like Ulgen Khan, can create, because this star of Ulgen in the shape of a diamond is called Ana (mother) in the design of Azerbaijani carpets. During the shaman's ascent to the fifth floor of the sky, the shaman reaches the mother goddess, which this symbol in the lachak section of the Tabriz carpet could have referred to that female goddess. The comb-like symbol also represents the boat that the shaman uses in the ritual ceremony during his ascension to the heavens. Overall, the design used in the Tabriz carpet on the right side of Figure 9 depicts all the stages of the shaman's ascension, with circles symbolizing celestial bodies,

rainbow and lightning lines, flowers, the starry sky symbol, and dragons surrounding it. Besides,

three flowers near each other  refer to the seeds of the tree of life.



Figure 10. The boat in which the shaman ascends. It is used in the lachak section of the Tabriz carpet (Hoppal, 2013).



Figure 11. Symbols related to man, woman, and childbirth that are also used in the lachak section of the Tabriz carpet (Hoppal, 2013).

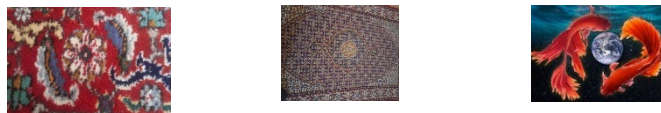


Figure 12. Tabriz Fish Carpet/ Mahi

On the edge of the Tabriz carpet, around the eight-petaled flower (symbol of the octahedron world), there are two leaves, similar to the shamanistic belief that the earth is held by two fish facing each other and one fish facing north (Tabriz Fish Carpet). These fish have taken an abstract form. And they appear as leaves facing each other.

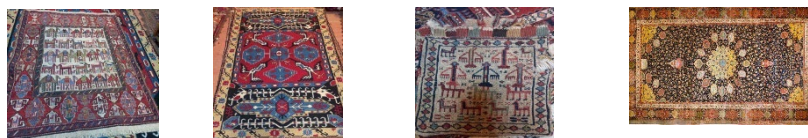
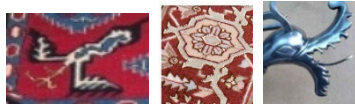


Figure 13. Shahseven kilim from Azerbaijan and Ardebil carpet

The eight-pointed star design is seen in the middle of the Shahseven kilim and the star of Ulgen in the form of a diamond in the two vernis, along with special sacrificial animals or animals found in the life of the Turks. Also, in the third kilim from the right, the polar star, the place of Ulgen's residence, is shown in the form of $\times$ resembling the Ulgen star. The four elements and goddesses of water, wind, earth, and fire are important elements of shamanism, which have also entered other religions, including Zoroastrianism and Turkish mysticism of the Tabriz school. In the carpet on the right, which is an Ardabil carpet, the sun symbol is in the middle of the carpet, indicating that in Turkish shamanism, everything in the world revolves around the sun and the Ulgen star (pole star). The sun is the symbol of Tengri, the god who breathes the soul into the human body.



These symbols also represent the dragon, the guardian of the heavens in shamanism.

Turkish symbols or Tamgha in carpets, kilims, and vernis of Tabriz, Azerbaijan, Anatolia, and other Turkic peoples



Figure 14. ELIBELINDE - Hands on Hips (Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>).

A stylized female figure derived from the mother goddess figurines and used as a symbol of motherhood and fertility (Çetintaş and Ağırbaş, 2019).



Figure 15. KOÇBOYNUZU - Ram's Horn (Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>)

It is a crescent-shaped symbol of fertility, heroism, strength, and masculinity found on Azerbaijani tombstones. Rams and other horned animals are among the spirit guide animals in shamanism.



Figure 16. BEREKET - Fertility Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A kilim motif composed of elibelinde and koçboynuzu motifs arranged to include various protective symbols. Stylized representations of multi-grained plants such as wheat, barley, pomegranate, poppy, melon, figs, grapes, and mulberry are also used to indicate fertility (Çetintaş & Ağırbaş, 2019).



Figure 17. INSAN - Human Figure Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A stylized representation used to commemorate a person, to express the hope for having a child, or to imply the expectation of a baby (Çetintaş and Ağırbaş, 2019).



Figure 18. SAÇBAĞI - Hair Band Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A rug motif evolved as a symbolic representation of the head ornament used by the bride in the wedding ceremonies, which indicates the desire to get married (Çetintaş and Ağırbaş, 2019).



Figure 19. KÜPE - Earring Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A kilim rug motif resembling the shape of an earring, an indispensable wedding present, is used to express the desire for marriage.

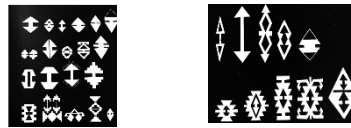


Figure 20. BUKAĞI - Fetter Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

It is a cuff-shaped motif symbolizing the continuity of the family union, the devotion of lovers, and the hope to stay together (Koyuncu and Genç, 2015).



Figure 21. SANDIKLI - Chest Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A motif which symbolizes the trousseau chest of a young woman stands for the desire to get married and have a child. In some cases, the motif symbolizes death and a coffin (Koyuncu and Genç, 2015). Sometimes the carpet weaver shows their hope and desire within the carpet. For example, a young girl shows her interest in marriage with these signs.



Figure 22. AŞK VE BİRLEŞİM - Love and Unison Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A carpet motif that exists in Buddhism in addition to shamanism is used to show harmony between men and women (Koyuncu and Genç, 2015). Buddhism entered Azerbaijan during the Sassanid and Mongol periods. Buddha was a Saka Turkic prince, and all Buddhist symbols are modified shamanistic symbols.



Figure 23. YILDIZ/ Ulduz - Star Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A rug motif used to express happiness and fertility, based on the fact that the pointed star, generally known as Solomon's seal, is used to symbolize the womb of the mother goddess figurines. Of course, these are all created by combining the triangle symbol of the goddess Umay, the protective goddess. Star motifs with eight or more points are used in weaving (Koyuncu and Genç, 2015).

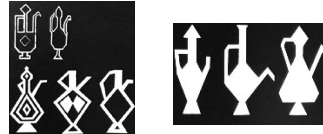


Figure 24. IBRIK - Ewer Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A motif stylized in the form of a water container, symbolizing purity and purification, and used also as a symbol of pregnancy (Koyuncu and Genç, 2015).



Figure 25. SU YOLU - Running Water Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

This theme indicates the importance of water in the life of mankind. Motifs in the forms of meanders, clouds and, even vases and ewers are all different expressions of the same theme. The pattern of running water varies according to the material on which it is applied. When carved on stone, it assumes an angular shape, while it is curvilinear or triangular on weavings (Sevim and Canay, 2013). In addition, the shaman's clothing is embroidered in this zigzag pattern.



Figure 26. PITRAK - Burdock Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A motif derived from a plant that is believed to be capable of warding off the evil eye. The fact that the term "like a burdock" means full of flowers accounts for the use of the motif as a symbol of abundance (Sevim and Canay, 2013).



Figure 27. EL, PARMAK, TARAK - Hand, Finger, Comb

Rug motifs that are composed of five lines or five dots are based on the belief that the number five, i.e., the number of fingers on a hand (symbol of Umay Ana), serves as a protection against the evil eye. The Hand motif is used against a spell or evil eye, where the comb motif is related to the protection of birth and marriage (Sevim and Canay, 2013).



Figure 28. MUSKA/ Taveez/ Nezerlik – Amulet Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

It believed to have magical and religious powers to protect the possessor from dangerous external factors. It is generally placed in triangular cases. A motif used to reduce the effect of the evil glance believed to be a power possessed by some people that causes harm, injury, misfortune, and even death (Sevim and Canay, 2013).



Figure 29. ĞOZ - Eye Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A stylized eye motif derived from the belief that the best source to prevent the harms caused by the evil glance is the human eye itself (Sevim and Canay, 2013).



Figure 30. HAÇ/ Oz - Cross Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A rug or kilim design motif used against the evil eye and believed to reduce the power of the evil glance by dividing it into four pieces (Sevim and Canay, 2013). These signs are derived from the Polar Star of Ulgen Khan's position. That is, we ask God to protect us from the evil forces created by Erlik Khan.



Figure 31. ÇENGEL - Hook Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A motif used against the evil eye. Of course, in Azerbaijani carpets, they are also called ajdahs/dragons, which are the guardians of the celestial realms.



Figure 32. İlân/YILAN – Snake/ EJDİR - Dragon Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

It is used for protective purposes, while a black snake is the symbol of happiness and fertility. A mythological theme where a winged creature stylized with the feet of a lion and the tail of a snake is believed to be the master of air and water, the cause of lunar eclipse, the guard of treasures and secret objects, as well as the tree of life. This dragon may be Simirig/ Simorgh/ phoenix. A related theme is the fight of the dragon and the Phoenix, which is believed to produce fertile rains of spring, and where the dragon is stylized as a cloud (Sevim and Canay, 2013). In the Tabriz carpet on the right, the octahedral world of Turkic shamanism is seen, in which a battle has taken place between the dragon and Simirg (Simorgh). Simirg is the mother goddess of Umay Ana.



Figure 33. AKREP - Scorpion Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A Kilim or Rug motif used as a protection against the scorpion, sometimes used to represent a dragon (Sevim and Canay, 2013). Dragons are guardians of the celestial realms, and by killing them, the shaman meets the gods.



Figure 34. KURT AĞZI, KURT IZI - Wolf's Mouth, Wolf's Track/ CANAVAR AYAĞI - Monster's Feet
Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A motif used as a protection against the wolves, which is the primary threat to the cattle breeding nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes. It is the motif that symbolizes the dragon (Sevim and Canay, 2013).

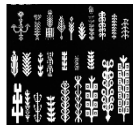


Figure 35. HAYAT AĞACI/ Yaşam Agaci - Tree of Life

It is a theme that stands for the wish of immortality or the hope for life after death. Stylization of various plants, such as cypress, date, palm, pomegranate, fig, olive, wine, beech, and oak, is used to symbolize the tree of life (Koyuncu and Genç, 2015).



Figure 36. ÇİÇEK - Flower Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A rug motif generally used on the borders of Kilims, composed of stylized roses, carnations, tulips, and hyacinths, which resemble the Garden of Eden. The Tulip is also used to express the expectation of a son (Koyuncu and Genç, 2015).



Figure 37. İM - Family Signs Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

They stand for the names of various Turkish tribes. In the image on the right, the dragons around the divine court in the Heriz carpet are depicted as the symbol of the Qayi tribe of the Oghuz Turks. This symbol is also present in Tabriz carpets, but has gradually taken on an abstract form.



Figure 38. KUŞ - Bird Downloaded from <https://www.yashar-bish.com/>

A kilim, rug, or carpet motif which is loaded with various meanings, ranging from good luck to bad luck; happiness, joy, and love; the soul of the dead; women; longing; an expectation of news; power and strength (Koyuncu and Genç, 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

It can be argued that Tamgas and the motifs used in Turkic carpets, kilims, and vernis represent pictographic elements of early Turkic symbolic expression. In most of the carpets of Tabriz and Azerbaijan, the central figure symbolizes a star, either the North Star, which in the shamanistic Turkish culture is the center of the universe, or the sun, which is the symbol of the sky god Tingri. Just as in other carpets, images revolve around the center; in reality, other objects revolve around the sun or the North Star. The Tree of Life exists in various forms, such as a flower or a cypress/paisley, which is not only used by the shaman to reach the portal of Ulgen and ask for help. This tree also symbolizes reaching the portal of the Turkic creator god Ulgen and is planted in front of his portal. There is also an image of the tree of life on the tombstones of Azerbaijan, and in ancient times, a branch of a sacred tree was placed in the graves of Azerbaijanis so that the soul of a person could reach the divine court after death. Around this star, some outgrowths symbolized the dragons that guarded the celestial layers and were killed by the shaman during his ascension. Planets and stars in the form of flowers rotate throughout the space around the central symbol. Just as the shaman's task is to drive away evil spirits, the images on the carpet, with symbols that indicate the location of the god Ulgen, the god of goodness, and symbols for driving away evil spirits, try to bring good luck and blessings to the home, but this time by entering the world of art that flows in human life. The carpet and its designs remind the Turkic people of their ancient religion and the presence of the god of goodness, Ulgen, everywhere in the home. Knowing the meaning of these designs and their expansion will further promote the carpet industry in Tabriz and Azerbaijan, and the value of this art among the people will also increase. Because all these designs are present in the decorations of historical monuments and tombs with the same meaning.

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