

SYMBOLS AND THEIR SEMANTIC FIELD IN THE ARMENIAN CARPET ORNAMENTS

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Abstract: *the article examines the symbol in general, as well as various interpretations of symbolism, national symbols, Armenian symbols, and the significance of them in Armenian carpets. Symbols in general carry complex data, therefore, perhaps both different interpretations and explanations of the term "symbol" and the semantics of the word itself are important to be noted. Kant stated that a person perceives outer experience in space, and inner experience in time. According to Newton, time and space appear as a whole, however exist both independently of each other and of material objects.*

Thus, what kind of perception is symbolic perception? How did it originate in human consciousness and what are its manifestations? "The symbol-making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking, or moving about. It is the fundamental process of his mind, and goes on all the time. Sometimes we are aware of it, sometimes we merely find its results, and realize that certain experiences have passed through our brains and have been digested there."¹ Symbolization of the external world by a person is the first manifestation of consciousness; it is more general than thinking, reasoning, imagination or perception.

Keywords: *symbols, national symbols of Armenia, Armenian carpet, composition of Armenian carpet, symbolism of Armenian carpets.*

СИМВОЛЫ И ИХ СЕМАНТИЧЕСКОЕ ПОЛЕ В ОРНАМЕНТАХ АРМЯНСКИХ КОВРОВ

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Аннотация: *в статье анализируется как символ в целом, так и различные трактовки символики, национальные символы, армянские символы и их значение в армянских коврах.*

Символы в целом несут в себе сложную информацию, поэтому, важно отметить как различные трактовки и объяснения термина "символ", так и семантику самого слова. Кант утверждал, что человек воспринимает внешний опыт в пространстве, а внутренний - во времени. Согласно Ньютону, время и пространство предстают как единое целое, однако существуют как независимо друг от друга, так и от материальных объектов. Следовательно, каким видом восприятия является символическое восприятие. Как оно возникло в человеческом сознании и каковы его проявления "Функция создания символов - это один из основных видов деятельности человека, такой же, как еда, взгляд или передвижение. Это фундаментальный процесс его сознания, который происходит постоянно. Иногда мы его осознаем, иногда просто находим его результаты и понимаем, что определенный опыт прошел через наш мозг и был там переварен". Символизация человеком внешнего мира - это первое проявление сознания, оно более общее, чем мышление, рассуждение, воображение или восприятие.

Ключевые слова: *символы, национальные символы Армении, армянский ковер, композиция армянского ковра, символика армянских ковров.*

Introduction

The symbol has been interpreted differently in different cultures depending on religious or cult characteristics and customs. It is interesting to explore how symbols become national, what kind of long journey they pass in the course of their formation and final semantic styling, and what changes they undergo along the way.

¹ S. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*, M., 2000, page 31.

National symbols enrich and spice up culture, which is reflected in everything- from simple household habits to national ideology. The Armenian symbols have been formed throughout centuries. Some examples of symbols were formed as early as pagan times and have their unique place in Armenian culture to this day.

National symbols transmit from generation to generation the exclusive information about the nation's habits, lifestyle, and cultural accentuations, which is essential for the next generation to learn about its national identity more deeply and not to abandon its roots. Through this epistemological knowledge the semantic field is formed. This knowledge cannot be conveyed through simple text, it is more versatile and is transmitted to the generation through symbols.

Armenian symbols have thematic and stylistic diversity and are used in various cultural and national spheres. Symbols can be placed in several large groups: ritualistic, moral-ethical, historical-geographical, national and state symbols. Armenian symbols are multi-layered (ritual, moral-ethical, naturalistic, historical-geographical, national, and state symbols). These types are found in rock paintings, Armenian national costumes, letters, rituals, and national stamps, however this study is focused on the symbols depicted primarily in the carpet ornaments.

The golden age of Armenian carpets

The flourishing period of Armenian carpet weaving is considered to be the Middle Ages, and later the 17th and 18th centuries, due to the development and production of carpet weaving and the export of carpets, however, it should be noted that the first Armenian carpet, Pazyryk, dates back to the 5th century BC. According to Ulrich Schurman, the Pazyryk carpet could have been created "where Armenians lived."²

Ashkhunj Poghosyan also made the structural analysis of the Pazyryk carpet. "The cruciform rosette in the center of the carpet, as well as the animal-shaped compositions on the borders, the horsemen and parts of their gear are typical elements of the Assyro-Babylonian and early Armenian (Urartian) wall painting and mosaic decoration system of the 2nd-1st millennium BC."³

One of the main branches of Armenian medieval culture heritage (tracing roots back to antiquity) is the carpet. "Armenian carpets are distinguished by the diversity of their ornaments, localized stylistic features, and the harmony of the compositional storytelling."⁴

The Armenian carpet, both as an artistic value and as a material cultural heritage, is related to ancient motifs, beliefs, worship rituals, myths and the universe in general.

In the compositions of Armenian carpet patterns, there are many ornaments depicting the elements of nature, particularly the images of earth, water, and fire. Images related to space - sun, stars, various luminaries, are also significant. The carpets with the depiction of the elements of space are consistent with the cave paintings. The image of the sun is one of the most common ones: it had a divine meaning for humans, because it provided light, heat, and harvest. As a result of its vital and ontological significance, the sun was worshiped and depicted in paintings both in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages.

The ritualistic and worship function of the ancient Armenian carpet Yerakhoran⁵ (three-apsed or triple-arched) dating back to 1202 and the artistic embodiment of various symbols on it prove that the carpet was considered a sacred object in Armenia.

Armenian carpet culture is rich not only in variations of its styles, but also in its variety of carpets and the variety of symbols used in them. For example, Vishapagorg (Dragon carpet) carpets are characterized by the combination of animal and floral motifs, and in these compositions, the main character of Armenian mythology, traditions and fairy tales - the dragon, occupies a central place. In Armenian culture, the dragon was a multifaceted figure: on the one hand, it was the tribal symbol in the flourishing period of Armenia, and on the other hand, it was the transformation of god Vahagn of pagan Armenian mythology.

In the Armenian household, the carpet was used and in some places continues to be used in various ritual ceremonies for example to ensure successful childbirth or during wedding ceremonies, funeral rites and other holidays. The floral and animal motifs used in the Dragon Carpet patterns suggest that quite a large number of animals were associated with the notion of victory and stood as symbols of it.

The carpet with a "tree of life" depicted on it is considered one of the subtypes of the dragon carpet. The composition of this carpet pattern is striking with an abundance of floral ornaments. In the pagan period the tree of life was perhaps the most vivid expression of people's ideas about the world around them.

² V. Ganzhorn, *The Christian Oriental Carpet: A Presentation of Its Development, Iconologically & Iconographically*, Yerevan, 2013, p. 15.

³ A. Poghosyan, *Collection of Rugs and Carpets, Catalog*, Yer., 2018, p. 7.

⁴ M. Balayan, *State Carpets of Artsakh, Fabric Collection of the Museum of Historical Geography*, Yerevan, 2012, p. 11.

⁵ Ashkhunj Poghosyan *Rug Weaving Culture of Artsakh Historico-Ethnographic Illustrated Study*, <https://int-heritage.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Rug-weaving-culture-of-Artsakh.pdf>, p. 14.

In Armenian carpet weaving culture, the symbolic image of "Cosmic Tree" or "Cosmic Pillar" is very popular. This ornament is accompanied by a dragon and images symbolizing cosmic balance and eternity. The idea of the center of the universe was most often depicted on carpets through symbolic images of the tree of life and the sun. According to mythological concepts, in the sacred center, in one case the support pillar of the world - the Tree of Life, is depicted, in another case, it is the sun attached to the firmament. Placing an image of a tree in the center of the structural model of the world is conditioned by tree worship of the time, which was also noted by the 5th century Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi in his "The history of Armenia".

In Armenia, walnut tree, chinar, poplar, sycamore and willow used to be objects of worship. During the Christian era, the Tree of Life was reinterpreted and became a symbol of the lineage. Although there are many testimonies about the presence of BC era carpets, however, the studies on the types of carpets, the symbols used in them, thematic features and the applicability of the carpet mainly refer to the transition period when Christianity came to replace paganism in Armenia and, thus, continue from that historic period on. Many of the symbols used in carpets during this period remained the same in appearance, but their meaning changed.

"The composition of the Armenian carpet, like the mythical model of the world, has a regular, tripartite structure and consists of three parts:

1. center (medallion - medallions placed with a vertical centerline, or ornaments bearing the idea of the center, depicted in the repeated episodes of the carpet, the center of each episode is emphasized)
2. surrounding field area of the center with images of space objects depicted on it (images of luminaries, animals, and people)
3. a belt enclosing the carpet field, comparable to a belt that bounds and protects the universe".⁶

In Armenian culture, the idea of the universe and the center of the world has been conveyed through various symbols. Denoting the center of the universe and the world through the medallions placed in the carpets and the ornaments bearing the idea of a separate center may have been connected with the idea that the Earth was the center of the world according to the people of the time. If we accept that the center is the Earth, then the depiction of cosmic objects around it is completely logical. Depicting the "earth's crust", the part that delimits and protects the universe, with pictures of people and animals has a symbolic meaning- people, animals and plants sustain the earth and provide life in the earth.

In Armenian carpets, the right-left, up-down symmetry of the medallion is found, and the sides of the world are defined by the center. The rhythmic repetition of the belt and ornaments, which is also found in the compositions of some rock paintings, is an attempt to reproduce the cycle of nature.

The frequently encountered ornaments span the pre-Christian period, the Middle Ages and reach up to the 18th-19th centuries, one of the flourishing periods of carpet weaving art. Regarding the Armenian carpet ornaments, the album-catalog Armenian Carpet ART 18th-20th of the History Museum of Armenia notes that "carpets ornaments are a combination of elements of late Hittite, Urartian and Phrygian art. Ornaments of these traditional forms of the early period were sculptures, practical objects and, above all, mosaics. These traditional forms were borrowed and continued with identical content by the Eastern Christian churches of Armenians and Syrians."⁷

Armenian carpets are usually surrounded by a belt, they consist of one, two, three, sometimes five belts.

The bound belts are also found in khachkars (cross-stones). Since the khachkar (cross-stone) also symbolizes the holy altar, it is often framed with an arched or vertical border. The symbol of the sun is often found in Armenian carpets. The sun and other luminaries of the universe are found in the rugs mainly in the central part and sometimes in the parts to the right and left of the center.

In the carpet ornaments, the disk of the sun is depicted with an octagonal or hexagonal decoration. The circular ornament of the sun is also found in the wall paintings of the temple dedicated to the Armenian pagan god Khaldi. There is a large number of crossed stars, in which the four wings of the cross symbolize the four sides of the earth. "In carpets, the up-down direction is especially noticeable in the compositions of carpets with plant/floral motifs, whereas the right-left directions are associated with the ideological images of death.

For primitive man, the up-down, right-left sides of the world are particularly important during ritual ceremonies, and this is vividly expressed in the Pazyryk carpet. Semantically, elements and objects on opposite sides of the center of the world express the idea of duality of the world."⁸

On the Armenian carpets, symbols of the sun can also be found inside the circumference, not only in the center. "The symbol of the sun is often accompanied by an image of a crescent moon. The crescent, symbolizing the moon,

⁶ L. Avanesyan. The Etymology and Semantics of Ornaments in Armenian Carpets, Yerevan 2020, p. 10.

⁷ Armenian Carpet ART 18th-20th, History Museum of Armenia, catalog, Yerevan, 2013, p. 58.

⁸ L. Avanesyan. The Etymology and Semantics of Ornaments in Armenian Carpets, Yerevan, 2020, p. 10.

is generally placed inside the perimeter of the carpet, along with the sun sign. On the rugs, the crescent of the moon is in the shape of a horn, in the center of which is the symbol of the sun. The phenomenon of the sun and the moon replacing each other or appearing together in the firmament gave rise to the belief of them being brother and sister, which found its expression even in Armenian personal names. In the Armenian mythology, Arev-Mihr has male characteristics, while Moon-Anahit has female characteristics.⁹

Conclusion

Numbers have their own significance in Armenian carpets; semantically they refer to the structure of the universe. Color symbols also have a great significance in the mythological perceptions of the person: white, red and black (blue) are among the sacred tricolor. "Armenian carpets are dominated by shades of red (purple), blue, and ivory, close to white. Red, blue and white colors are the sacred tricolor in Armenian carpets.

Blue symbolizes the water and the water system, while white, red and black symbolize the sky, the earth, and the underworld respectively.¹⁰ Thus, in the entire palette of Armenian carpet art, we can say that in the compositions of Armenian carpets, the carpet patterns stand out for their rhythmic arrangement: they are distinguished by their shape, color, placement and repetition, all this providing a special rhythmicity in the composition. In the structure of carpet patterns, rhythmicity is demonstrated by the symmetrical arrangement of colors, with patterns located at the same distance from the center and vertical and horizontal repetition of images.

In some rugs, we find central three-part compositions, which can be assumed to carry the idea of the three-part model of the world mentioned above (the image in the center of the composition shows the idea of a three-story world pillar: the roots are underground, the core is in the middle of the world - on the Earth, the top is in the upper part- in the sky), which is sometimes also symbolized in the form of a tree of life.

The main part of the three-part pattern is located in the center, it is the medallion, above and below which the other two parts of the pattern are located at an equal distance, all three have the same dimensions and the same color gamut.

In general, Armenian carpets are dominated by nature worshiping elements, which are common both in Armenian carpets and national costumes, as well as in national dances and singing.

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⁹ L. Avanesyan. *The Etymology and Semantics of Ornaments in Armenian Carpets*, Yerevan, 2020, p. 33.

¹⁰ L. Avanesyan. *The Etymology and Semantics of Ornaments in Armenian Carpets*, Yerevan, 2020, p. 97.