



Theosophical-Philosophical Foundation of Iranian Art
Volume 3 / Issue 3 / pages 237-254 / e-ISSN: 2980-7875 / p-ISSN: 2981-2356

Original Research

10.30486/PIA.2024.140307091185485



From Dome to Carpet: A Comparative Study of Decorative Arts in the Safavid Era (Case Studies: Sheikh Lotfollah Dome and Sheikh Safi Carpet)

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Abstract

Introduction: One of the most significant periods in Iranian history concerning art and industry, particularly carpet weaving, is the Safavid era. During this time, geometric forms flourished in carpet design, reaching their zenith through a structured and logical framework. Additionally, the Safavid period is regarded as the pinnacle of exterior ornamentation in architecture, with a particular emphasis on domes. Given the symbolic nature of religious arts, this study aims to identify the shared characteristics of carpet weaving and tilework during the Safavid period by examining the external tile decorations of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque dome and comparing them with the motifs used in the Sheikh Safi carpet. The primary objective of this research is to analyze and elucidate the patterns and designs employed in these two Safavid-era masterpieces. In this context, the following key questions arise: What are the motifs and decorative elements used in the external covering of the Sheikh Lotfollah dome? Are these motifs also present in the Sheikh Safi carpet? What are the similarities and differences between the motifs identified in the external tilework of the dome and those in the Sheikh Safi carpet?

Methodology: This study employs a historical approach using a descriptive-analytical-comparative methodology and is conducted as a case study. The selected case samples include the dome of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan and the Sheikh Safi carpet in Ardabil, both remarkable artifacts from the Safavid period. The analysis is based on the interpretation of existing documents and images through library research. To extract arabesque motifs and linear designs, perspective-free images were required. These images were then processed using Rhino and Photoshop software to generate graphical outputs for further analysis.

Results: The findings reveal that the dome of the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque features intricate arabesque motifs in black, white, and beige, arranged both symmetrically and asymmetrically, ultimately converging at the center—a representation of unity in diversity. Additionally, khatai motifs, including floral elements such as the Shah Abbas flower and the butterfly flower, are meticulously designed to guide the viewer's attention toward the center of the dome. An analysis of the Sheikh Safi carpet demonstrates a considerable variety of arabesque and khatai designs, incorporating dragon-head motifs and floral patterns. These elements are intricately woven in a spiral and symmetrical arrangement, leading the viewer's gaze inward.

Conclusion: In conclusion, this study indicates that both works incorporate arabesque and khatai motifs. While both belong to the Safavid era, the motifs used in each exhibit distinct variations in complexity and diversity. The color schemes and compositional arrangements in both pieces masterfully convey profound spiritual and philosophical concepts with exceptional artistic beauty.

Key words: Arabesque Motifs, Decorative Arts, Khatayi Motifs, Sheikh Safi's Carpet, Sheikh Lotfollah Dome

Received: 2024-09-30

Accepted: 2025-12-31

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