

## Original Research Article

# A Study on the Form and Content of Iran's Four-Seasons Carpets

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## Abstract

**Problem statement:** "Four Seasons" is one of the design structures of Iranian carpets, dating back to the first half of the twentieth century amid the cultural and social evolutions of Tabriz in the Qajar and the first Pahlavi eras. The combination of rural life scenes and historical buildings along with the structure and patterns of traditional designs in the Four Seasons pattern has made these carpets similar to visual texts illustrating the cultural and social situations of their production time. This study attempts to answer how the social and cultural conditions of a society are depicted in the Four Seasons Carpets and which visual symbols represent them. Hence, the main question of this study revolves around the identification of dominant subjects and effective social backgrounds in shaping the pattern of the Four Seasons in the geography of the Persian carpet.

**Research objective:** This study aims to identify dominant subjects in depicting landscapes, the geographical area of products, and effective social backgrounds in shaping the Four Seasons pattern.

**Research method:** The research method is qualitative and employs content analysis of patterns. First, 26 carpets containing the Four Seasons pattern were selected as case studies. Next, a qualitative analysis was conducted on the contents of each case based on the outlined questions and objectives in the study.

**Conclusion:** The results of the research indicate that all the identified samples were designed and hand-woven in Tabriz. The patterns of these carpets show nationalism, archaic concepts, and cultural-social customs of Iranian society in the form of visual and written signs.

**Keywords:** *Four Season Design, Four Garden Design, Garden Carpet, Tabriz Carpet, Historic Monuments.*

## Introduction

The variety of designs and roles derived from the culture, geography, and beliefs of the production communities is one of the main characteristics

of expressing the visual components of Iranian carpets. The structure of the design, the type of patterns, and the method of processing patterns in Iranian carpets have evolved and are influenced by socio-cultural developments and in line with the

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technical possibilities of production and have found their current method. Identifying the different types of carpet designs and their sources of inspiration, as well as how they relate to the culture and society of the producing regions is effective in identifying the different designs of Iranian carpets. After more than two centuries of their golden age in the Safavid era, Iranian carpets regained their glory in the middle of the nineteenth century and during the Qajar rule, which was influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Economic collapse and simultaneous extensive social and cultural changes in this period paved the way for the formation of diverse and innovative types of Iranian carpet designs. The four-season design is one of these novel types in the design of Iranian carpets, the date of its appearance in Iranian carpets and its current form dates back to the Qajar period. The dominant design structure in this design is influenced by the long-lasting structure of the garden and four gardens in Iranian art, whose history historically reaches the design pattern of the main plan of the garden of Cyrus in the Achaemenid Pasargadae (Stronach, 1969, 75). The design of this design is the display of landscapes appropriate to each of the four seasons of the year in each of the four main parts of the carpet and the associated atmosphere. The combination of scenes from rural life with the structure and motifs of traditional Iranian design in these designs has led to four-chapter designs as visual and cultural texts from a special place in the study and recognition of the foundations of identity, social ties, and cultural carpet designs. Social researchers believe that because works of art are produced, distributed, and consumed in a social context and by human factors, they cannot be immune to the effects of social variables and the hidden and obvious traces of social changes in cultural and artistic works can always be seen and studied. In other words, the existence of a work of art is closely related to the characteristics of a historical period, a social period, and so on. Therefore, the main issue of the present study is to study and recognize the design structure,

dominant issues, and social contexts influencing the formation of this special and innovative group of Iranian carpet designs. The lack of scientific and specialized research to identify and document the various cultural and historical dimensions of the four-chapter plans, while emphasizing the importance of the research issue, reveals the need for it. As evidenced by the studies conducted, so far, no research that specifically addresses such a goal has been conducted. Such research can emphasize the national and regional originality of Iranian carpet designs. The present study has been done with the understanding of this need and to identify the dominant issues in landscaping, the geographical scope of production, and social contexts influencing the formation of the four-chapter plan. This study attempts to answer two questions: 1-What are the dominant themes in the illustration of spaces related to each of the seasons in Four-Seasons carpets? 2. What social contexts have contributed to the formation of prototypes of four-seasons rugs?

## Research Background

The four-season plan has been created following the development of garden designs, especially Chaharbagh in Iranian art. In a study, Zarei (2011) has “reflected the role of Chaharbagh in the carpets of western Iran.” He has concluded that in Iran, at least from the pre-Islamic Achaemenid period and from the Timurid period, and especially the Safavid period of the Islamic period, there are signs of the relationship between gardening and carpet design in the form of using the four-garden pattern. Then, in another study, by studying the geometry and design patterns of Iranian gardens and carpets, Akbari, Nakhustin Khayat and Nakhustin Khayat (2018) have concluded that the two have common principles and inspire each other. To identify some common dimensions and principles of the garden pattern in the design of carpets with other arts, Mohammadzadeh and Nouri (2018) have carried out a study entitled “Study of the structure and angles of view of the Iranian garden in garden painting

and garden rugs in the Safavid period". In their study, they have focused on a comparative analysis of the composition and perspective of the audience towards the garden in these two visual areas. The results showed that the composition of the Persian garden in both paintings and Safavid garden rugs is derived from the Chaharbagh pattern and its four-dimensional symmetrical structure.

Despite the importance and visual richness of four-season rugs, little research has been done focusing on these rugs. The most important research has been done by Benam (2009) entitled "Tabriz Four Seasons Carpet", which has been published in serial form in three consecutive issues. In this article, the author introduces 6 examples of four-season historical carpets; the four-part structure of this design in connection with the mythical square; and four ancient celebrations (Nowruz celebration), spring celebration, (Tirgah or Abrizan celebration), summer celebration, (Mehregan celebration), and autumn celebration Autumn is known as the celebration of the winter. Other articles related to the subject of four-chapter carpets do not go beyond the format of short articles and a brief introduction to this design. Among these sources, we can mention Daneshgar (1997), who in the form of the book "Comprehensive Culture of Carpets" had a brief reference to this design along with an image and wrote: "There is a design in the carpet that represents the role of each part of that season." In this way, various scenes are woven into the carpet to show the desired chapter "(Daneshgar, 1997, 336). Also, Khoshgonabi (1999), in the book "Literature and Mysticism in Iranian Carpets", analyzes one of the exquisite four-season carpets from a private collection and writes that this design is a combination of several arts. Unfortunately, this rare masterpiece has not yet been considered to its full extent, and some of its effects have been kept secret from the discussion. He pointed out two important reasons for ignoring the four-chapter plan. First of all, these carpets were mainly sold after coming down from the carpet weaving tree and leaving Iran, and for this reason,

the opinion of Iranian experts has not been reached and information about their values has not become public. Another thing is that the designer and weaver of these carpets are not known to the public, and they often do not know which designer designed this artistic masterpiece and which weaver's hands found it on the rugs (Khoshknabi, 1999, 37).

In his study, Mirzaei (2019) has "explained the historical context of the phenomenon of modernity in the contemporary carpet of Tabriz." He has concluded that the geographical, political, and social position of Tabriz in the Qajar period and its proximity to the gates of Western civilization have caused the penetration of modernist ideas into society and the reflection of these ideas in various and innovative forms in the works of art of this city. The reviewed background shows that so far no valid research has been done to identify the different geographical, cultural, and social dimensions of the four-chapter plans, so the present study seeks to identify the different dimensions of these plans derived from the cultural history of Iran, is innovative, and has been pursued independently of previous research.

### Theoretical Foundations

Social studies of art have shown that the relationship between art and society can be studied using two dominant approaches, the "reflection approach" and the "shaping approach". In the meantime, the reflection approach, which studies the signs reflected from the social contexts of producers on works of art and culture, has formed the theoretical basis of the present study. Due to this approach, which has a long history in art studies, the arts always tell us something about society. The common theme of cultural research with the reflection approach is "the belief that art is the mirror of society or is conditioned or determined by society" (Alexander, 2003, 54). Artistic and cultural works, especially folk arts, because they are created, distributed, and consumed in a social context and by human factors, cannot be immune from the influence of social

variables and always have a hidden and obvious trace of social changes in the visual components of these works. is a study. On the other hand, “cultural symbols and signs help to produce new concepts, new social forms, new ways of thinking and acting, new attitudes and social realities in the field of political identity.” The process based on which the ability is created in people to interact with each other by using symbols, signs, and common language” (Nazari, 2007, 31). Studying to understand and interpret these common and general signs can help explain the emergence of folk arts in a particular form and specific periods.

By accepting the proposition of reflecting the social dimensions of society in the arts and the existence of cultural symbols of society in all artistic forms, the present study has studied the social and historical contexts effective in the formation of four-season carpets. Considering that the initial studies show the emergence of four-season carpet designs in a specific historical period (early twentieth century) and in a specific geography (Tabriz), the importance of studying the historical and social contexts of this phenomenon with a reflection approach has increased.

## Research Method

The research was carried out using data obtained from library sources and databases on historical topics and with the help of field studies and interviews with market experts to identify samples of four-season carpets and the historical course of the formation of this project. In terms of data type and analysis method, this research is qualitative research employing a descriptive-analytical approach. The sampling method was purposeful. In this way, the maximum sample of carpets produced with a four-chapter design was identified from written sources and field studies by referring to exhibitions, museums, and individuals. The search results identified 26 carpet boards with a four-season design (Fig. 1). Then the information from the samples was extracted based on the questions and

objectives of the research. The identity data of the statistical population of the research sample showed that the design and texture of all known samples of Iranian four-season carpets belong to the geography of Tabriz, which started in the late Qajar period and reached its peak in the first Pahlavi period. The production of these rugs more or less continues with the changes in the structure and composition of the designs to this day.

## The Evolution of the Four Season Plan

The structure of the four-season plan consists of dividing the carpet text space into four sections and landscaping in these spaces in accordance with each of the four seasons of the year. The study of the geometric structure and atmosphere of this design shows that there is a close relationship between the structure of the four-season design and the four-garden design in Iranian carpets. Therefore, considering the historical antiquity of the four-garden design, the first step in the structure of the four-season design is to gain a relative knowledge of the four-garden design in Iranian carpets. Although the history of using the garden pattern in Iranian art goes back to the design and construction of Iranian gardens in the first millennium BC, historical studies trace the history of using the garden structure in Iranian carpets to Bahar Khosrow or Baharestan carpets in the Sassanid period. The descriptions of the design of this rug show that the general structure of this rug is a spring garden map decorated with flowers and plants, which was used in royal feasts. (Tabari, 1986, V. 5, 1824). After this period and after nearly a thousand years, the first examples of surviving carpets with gardens and four garden designs belong to the Safavid period. During this period, several examples of Chaharbaghi carpets influenced by the art of Iranian gardenin g have survived. A comparative study of garden c arpets and the architecture of Iranian gardens i n the Safavid period show the flourishing perio d of Iranian gardening art based on the four-g arden model. Four gardens evoke the symbolic meaning



Fig. 1. Images of the statistical population of the research (sample 26 is shown in Fig. 3). Source: Authors' Archive.

of heaven (Mahmoudizezhad , 2011, 113). The compatibility of the four-dimensional structure of the garden design with the cultural and religious concepts of the Safavid society arose from the Safavid rulers' interest in the Chaharbagh model during court art. So that "the Chaharbagh pattern as one of the most common patterns in the formation of Iranian and Islamic gardens has been considered by garden makers and artists of the Safavid period" (Mohammadzadeh & Nouri, 2018, 28). Since the design of these carpets showed the normal division of the garden into four equal parts, their design was called Baghi, Golestan, and Chaharbagh (Wilber, 2006, 32). The central part of these rugs reflected the pond or pool of water of the Persian garden, from which streams of water flowed in four directions, watering the side gardens, trees, flowers, and shrubs along the way (Fig. 2). Extensive use of the four-garden pattern in Safavid-era carpets caused the institutionalization of this design structure in the history of Iranian carpets and its continuation until today. After two centuries of Iranian carpet weaving, in the Qajar period, the four-dimensional structure of Safavid garden designs provided a suitable platform for the implementation of ideas and innovations resulting from the visual, cultural, and social changes appropriate to this period. The occurrence of extensive cultural and social changes due to the influence of the manifestations of Western civilization in the society of the Qajar period caused the phenomenon of image and illustration in its new concept and form to be used in various arts of this period, including carpets. During the Qajar period, along with various types of pictorial carpets, carpets were produced that put aside the realistic aspects and propaganda functions of the Western illustration phenomenon and used only the ability of narration and visual representation of a popular concept in carpet design. The creators of the design of these rugs found the cultural and historical structure of the Safavid four-garden rugs as a suitable platform for implementing their creative ideas. These new visual and innovative designs were called "four seasons",

the production of which began in the Qajar period and has more or less continued to this day.

In this design, each of the four spaces adapted from the four-garden design is dedicated to depicting folk and mostly rural scenes, in the background of which one of the historical monuments of the well-known name of Iran is illustrated. Field research shows that Hossein Mirmsavar Arjangi (1881–1963), a graduate of Mirk Conservatory and an innovative Tabrizi painter, invented the first four-season carpet design in the late Qajar period. The first designs were woven in the "creative" carpet weaving workshop (Fig. 3). In addition to painting the epic and national themes and narratives of Iran, Mirmasour is also known as a person of style and flow in designing Tabriz carpets. So, the main reputation of Tabriz carpets in the field of innovative and visual designs in the early twentieth century has been the result of Mirmsavar's innovations and creativity in presenting innovative types of pictorial carpets (Qarabaghi, 2020).

### Structure of the Four Seasons Plan

The structural analysis of the four-chapter design in the studied carpets shows that the four-part background of the text along with the medallion background has provided a suitable space for illustration and role-playing by the carpet design artists. In this section, first, quantitative findings from the analysis of samples are presented and then qualitative and interpretive analysis of these findings is discussed.

Analysis of the content of the field dedicated to spring in four-season carpets (Table 1) shows that the Persepolis building pattern has appeared in 16 samples, more than any other historical building in the spring has been employed. The Soltanieh building and Kasra arch are in the next rows with the appearance in 6 and 4 samples, respectively. The depiction of ancient Iranian Nowruz celebrations in the carvings of Persepolis and the function of this building in hosting Nowruz celebrations have provided a suitable basis for carpet designers to use the images of this building in the spring atmosphere.



Fig. 2. Chaharbagh Carpet, Safavid Era, Victoria Albert Museum, London. Source: Ruedin, 1976, 37.



Fig. 3. Four Seasons carpet, preserved in the Carpet Museum of Iran, Mirmosavar design. Source: Authors' Archive.

Playing music and party scenes in 14 samples is the most illustrated subject in spring scenery in four-season rugs, and scenes from everyday life in nature in 11 samples, and plowing the ground and preparing it for planting is in 1 sample of illustrated subjects in the field of spring in carpets. Depicting life in the lap of spring nature and festive scenes along with playing music has established a great affinity with the functions described of the illustrated building

in the background of these images (Persepolis building) (Fig. 4).

Analysis of the content of the background dedicated to the summer season in four-season carpets (Table 2) shows that the Soltanieh building near Zanjan, with 16 repetitions of the most illustrated historical monument in the summer background, is The Shiraz Quran Gate with 5 repetitions, the Tabriz Blue Mosque with 3 repetitions, and the Persepolis building with 2 repetitions are in the next rows.

In proportion to the predominant activity of the villagers in the summer, the harvest of crops in 24 samples is the most illustrated subject in the field of summer in carpets. Two other scenes depict rural landscapes. Among the illustrated historical monuments in the field of carpets, Gonbad Soltanieh, in terms of being located on a wide and fertile plain, has established more connections with the harvesting activity by farmers (Fig. 5).

Studies show that the Kasra arch related to the Sassanid period with 13 cases of the most repetition of the illustrated monument in the background has the space related to the autumn season in four-season carpets. Unknown and possibly imaginary buildings, with 8 cases, and Kaboud Mosque of Tabriz and Persepolis buildings, with 3 and 2 cases, respectively, are other illustrated buildings in the field of the autumn season in four-season carpets (Table 3).

Plowing and preparing the land for planting is the most common occupation of the villagers in autumn, so it is not surprising that 16 samples including the images related to plowing and planting, and harvesting can be seen in 9 samples. These are the most illustrated subjects in the autumn carpet field (Fig. 6). A scene from rural life with one case is the other illustrated scene of the autumn season in the carpets of the four seasons.

#### • Winter space in four seasons carpets

Kaboud Mosque in Tabriz with 15 repetitions in winter, more than any other historical monument has been used in winter space. The harsh winters of Tabriz compared to other cities with historical

Table 1 .Buildings and illustrated subjects in spring illustration .Source :Authors

Rug number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	sum
Illustrated building	Persepolis	*	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*						*	*	*	*			*	*	*	16
	Soltanieh				*			*				*	*			*						*					6
	Kasra arch												*	*				*					*				4
Illustrated subject	Rural life	*		*	*		*	*	*			*	*		*		*		*		*						11
	Playing music		*			*	*			*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	14
	planting																					*				1	

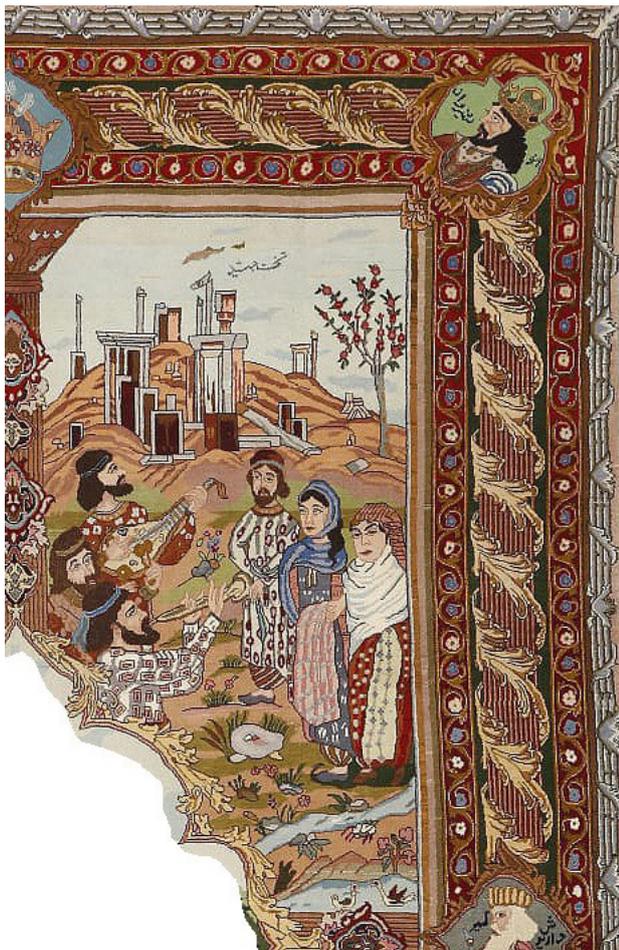


Fig. 4. Persepolis in the background of spring and villagers’ feast, part of the carpet. Source: Authors’ Archive.

monuments are perhaps one of the reasons for using this building in the background of scenes related to the winter season in four-season carpets. The number of unknown buildings, 6 cases; Persepolis building, 3 cases; and Chaharbagh school of Isfahan and Shah Isfahan mosque, each with one other case of illustrated buildings in the field related to winter, are carpets of four seasons (Table 4).

13samples include scenes from the life and activities

of the people in rural outfits, 8 samples cover a scene from the snowy nature of the village, and happy games of the village children and 5 samples are on other illustrated subjects representing the atmosphere of rural scenes in carpets (Fig. 7).

• **Illustration in the medallion space of four-season carpets**

the medallion is the most important and symbolic space in the semantics of the design and role of Iranian carpets. Symbolically, the medallion is closely related to the sun, the Persian garden, and the center of the universe. In the four-season carpets, the medallion space is considered a focal point of designers’ imagination, and various subjects are taken from myths.

In the studied carpets, the romantic themes taken from the ancient literature of Iran include the stories of Sheikh Kanaan and the daughter of Teresa, Lily, and Majnoon, and Khayyam’s love stories, in 14 samples are the most illustrated subjects inside the four-season carpets. The historical kings of Iran can be seen in 7 samples, the scene of the royal banquet in 2 samples, and the image of women carpet weavers, rural parties, and royal hunting grounds are illustrated in one sample (Table 5). In 15 examples of carpets, the outer frame of the medallion is dedicated to textual or symbolic inscriptions containing the months of the glorious Iranian calendar appropriate to each season of the year (Fig 8).

• **Social contexts of four-season carpet production**

Social studies of artworks show that, in contrast to the fine arts, which often represent the social order of the ruling class and are supported and recognized by cultural and artistic institutions, the popular arts, which are intertwined with the

Table 2. Buildings and illustrated subjects in summer illustration. Source: Authors.

Rug number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	sum
Illustrated building	Soltanieh	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	-	-	*	*	*	*	-	*	*	*	*	16
	Persepolis				*											*											2
	Quran gate						*			*	*								*				*				5
Illustrated subject	Blue Mosque												*			*	*										3
	Harvesting	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	Rural life															*						*					2

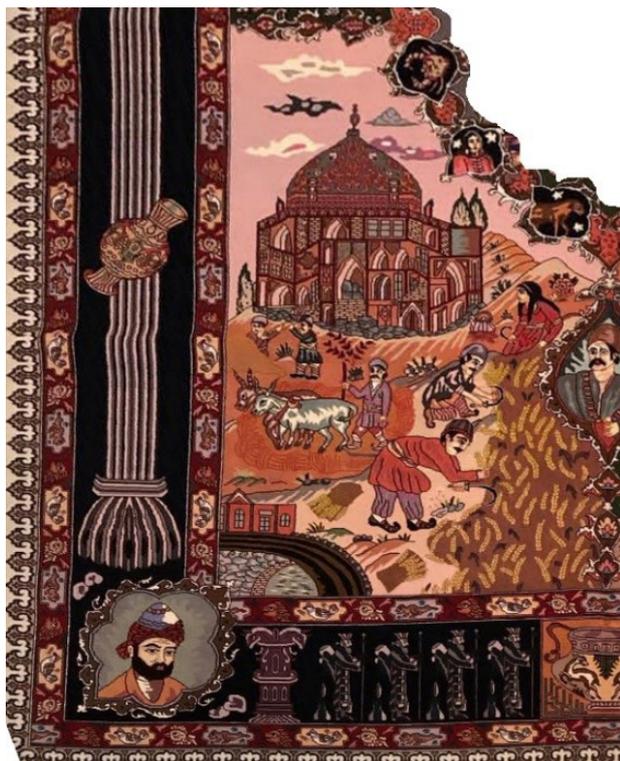


Fig. 5. Gonbad Soltanieh building in the background of summer and harvest, part of the carpet. Source: Authors’ archive.

Indigenous masses and communities, represent the ideals, inner intentions, and past and present culture of producers. In the meantime, pictorial carpets, as a perfect example of folk art, reflect the intentions and ideologies of the middle and middle classes of society. “Rugs are more than just a reflection of something in society; they are texts that represent traditions with their dynamism and fluidity... and are first-hand documents that, like literature, dynamism, and historical continuity, have their own” (Spoonier, 2011, 231). Carpets also have the capacity as a popular and all-encompassing medium to reflect the religious, social, and ideological aspirations of the producing societies and their sponsors.

At the end of the Qajar period and influenced by the emerging social and technological phenomena of that period, a significant group of Iranian carpets was dedicated to the reflection of realistic images such as human images, works of art, buildings, and natural landscapes. The use of such designs in carpets for the first time caused the spread of panel functions in Iranian carpets. Among the different groups of pictorial carpets of this period, carpets with a four-season design had a special place in terms of the type of images reflected in them and the display of rural scenes and historical monuments. Considering that the arts always have social and cultural signs from their birth, in this section, a set of effective factors in the emergence of the four-season plan in Tabriz in the early twentieth century is discussed.

After the long civil wars in post-Safavid Iran, during the Qajar period and following the relative stability created in the country, the Iranians realized their historical backwardness towards the West. During this period, “modernity dealt with Iran in its most shocking and awakening form” (Vahdat, 2007, 205). Following this confrontation, the elites of society and even kings such as Nasser al-Din Shah gained relative recognition of the economic and social backwardness of Iranian society among civilized nations, so that many of them tried unsuccessfully to modernize the country and make fundamental changes in the community. The continuation of these efforts led to the spread of modernist thinking among the social masses so that the roots of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution in 1906 can be traced to these structural and ideological changes during the nineteenth to twentieth centuries (Fray, 1996, 17). Attention to the geography of

Table 3. Buildings and illustrated subjects in autumn illustration. Source: Authors.

Rug number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	sum
Illustrated building	Kasra arch	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	13
	Persepolis											*				*											2
	Blue Mosque	*											*						*				*				3
	others							*			*	*		*					*				*	*	*	*	8
Illustrate d subject	harvesting	*	*	*	*			*	*	*	*								*								9
	planting				*	*	*					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	16
	Rural life																									*	1

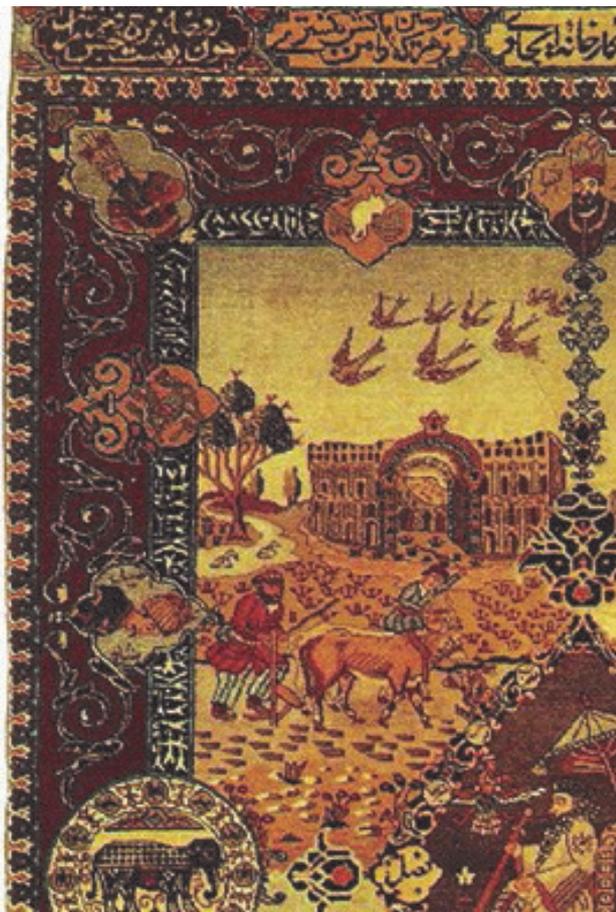


Fig. 6 .Kasra arch building in the background of the autumn season and the plowing scene ,part of the carpet .Source :Authors 'Archive.

the formation of ideas of constitutionalism and modernity in the social and cultural dimensions of twentieth-century Iran shows in these years Tabriz in terms of having a special geographical position and privileged economic and political conditions in the text of ideas It was modernist. In such a way that “if we want to evaluate the constitution from the point of view of the influence of foreign ideas

on domestic political and traditional methods, the arrival of these ideas was directly from Tabriz and from there to Tehran. This feature was in Isfahan and even Mashhad. Rarely did it exist second-hand or even third-hand. In reaching the inner core of the constitution, which is modernism, Tabriz seems to have taken the first steps and put pressure on Tehran” (Jafarian, 2006, 16). Alas, the lost historical greatness, criticism of the current situation, and the spread of modernist ideas in Tabriz coincided with the peak of Iranian carpet production and exports led by Azerbaijani merchants. Therefore, merchants and carpet producers became supporters and promoters of modernist ideas, especially the constitutional movement, by confronting Western businessmen and foreign travelers (Mirzaei & Rahmani, 2021, 141). Among the numerous Iranian pro-constitutional associations, which numbered more than thirty, the Association of Azerbaijanis, with more than 30,000 members, was the largest group sponsored by Tabriz merchants (Abrahamian, 20001, 79).

Since “more than half of the active labor force of the society in those years were absorbed in different parts of the carpet production system” (Foran, 1989, 93), carpet weavers, who were the most important cohesive labor organization, found the range of rugs to be a good platform for reflecting on their political and idealistic aspirations and goals. In particular, hand-woven carpets, as the only native export commodity and the savior of the dying economy of Iran, had a special status and had become a decorative and necessary element in all assemblies and communities (Zhoole, 2002, 18). The reasons

Table 4. Buildings and illustrated subjects in winter illustration, Source: Authors.

Rug number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	sum
Illustrated building	Blue Mosque	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	-	*	*	-	*	*	*	*	*	*					15
	Chaharbagh school												*														1
	Persepolis													*					*				*				3
	Shah mosque others								*			*				*				*				*	*	*	6
Illustrated subject	Rural life	*	*				*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	13
	Rural scenes			*	*	*								*	*				*					*	*	*	8
	Children games				*					*								*	*	*		*					5

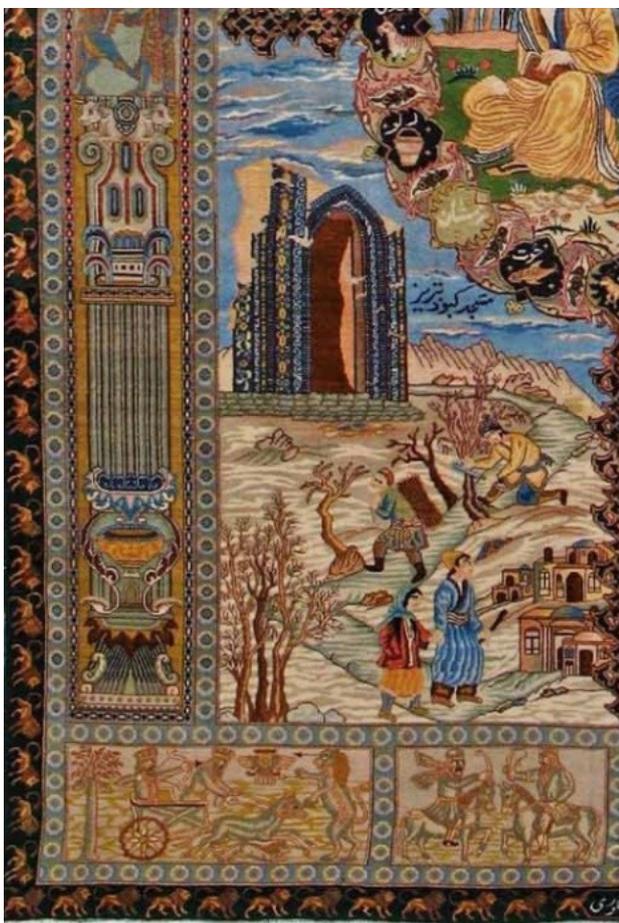


Fig. 7. Blue Mosque in the background of winter and the scene of rural life, part of the carpet. Source: Authors' Archive.

for the emergence of pictorial carpets known as constitutional carpets, carpets containing nationalist and revolutionary poems, as well as four-season pictorial carpets in Tabriz in the late Qajar period and coinciding with constitutional movements, can be explained in such an atmosphere. In particular,

the city of Tabriz is known as the most important center for the production of such carpets from the beginning of the twentieth century until today. Social movements and modernist ideas of the early twentieth century, in the face of the prevailing culture and progressive industries of the West and the aristocracy shaking the foundations of the identity of Iranian society, sought to rebuild the lost identity and pride of the Iranian nation. They formed their modernist slogans around concepts such as nationality, culture, and Iranianness. During these years, following the discoveries of Western archaeologists, various dimensions of the great civilizations of pre-Islamic Iran were revealed and the Western civilized world was admired. The publication of the results of historical research and the establishment of various exhibitions of the discovered works aroused a sense of pride combined with the regret of Iran's political and socio-cultural elites. Each of these people tried to reflect the signs of Iran's historical greatness and glory in their works and writings. The publication of newspapers with nationalist titles and content such as Vatan, Kaveh, and Iranshahr and addressing the issues of ancient Iranian culture such as Nowruz, Shahnameh, and pre-Islamic history, prompted efforts to restore the greatness of the past among urban social classes. Using the identity elements of Achaemenid architecture in constructing the facades of public and private buildings, constructing numerous monuments and architectural statues in different

Table 5. Illustrated buildings and subjects in the illustration of medallion space. Source: Authors.

Rug number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	sum
Illustrated subject	Historical kings	*	*	*		*				*					*						*						7
	Rural party				*																						1
	Literature contents					*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*				*	*			*	*	*	*	14
	Royal banquet																	*	*								2
	Women weavers																					*					1
	royal hunting																									*	1



Fig. 8. Landscape painting in medallion space, part of the carpet. Source: Authors' Archive.

cities with the pattern of ancient Iranian architecture, changing the Iranian calendar from lunar to imperial, establishing the Ministry of Culture and Arts, establishing The first historical museums in Iran, the establishment of the General Directorate of Antiquities and the adoption of the Antiquities Law in 1944 were among the efforts of cultural and political elites to restore the lost national identity of Iranians in the early twentieth century. Contemporary Iran is referred to as archaic thinking. "Archeism or archaism is one of the new components for the modernization of Iran which reproduces a new order in social, cultural, and political thought by reviving ancient traditions and beliefs to build new cultural and social infrastructures based on ancient traditions" (Akbari, 1998, 188).

Simultaneously, with the fundamental changes in the

social and cultural dimensions of society and under the influence of the arrival of photography and the printing industry in the country, the movement of illustration in carpets was launched, and cultural and social elites found carpets a good platform for reflecting political messages. Especially in those years, carpets were the most important art and export goods of Iran. The production of four-season rugs in special dimensions (rugs) and the use of paintings and pendants on them intensified their media image. It was in the context of such developments that carpets with the famous design of the four seasons became visual and readable media for the public, to reflect the prevailing ideas of Iranian society, especially in Tabriz in the early twentieth century.

### Conclusion

Analysis of the designs and patterns in the field of four-season carpets shows attention to the cultural and national monuments and symbols of Iran, including well-known historical monuments and buildings. They highlight Nowruz celebrations and Shahnameh reading; activities, and celebrations related to the Shahriari calendar of ancient Iran; reconstruction of scenes from the lives of kings and historical celebrities of Iran; calligraphy of national and epic poems are an important part of the visual elements of these carpets. Self-assigned designers and manufacturers found the range of these rugs to be a good platform to show parts of the glorious cultural and civilizational landmarks of lost history. In particular, the special dimensions, the function of the panels in general, and the fact that these

carpets are wall-mounted could also reflect the intentions and aspirations of the carpet owners, while at the same time reflecting fundamental changes in traditional and flooring functions of carpets.

In general, the two main and institutionalized features in the social history of the Qajar period can be seen repeatedly in the four-season carpets. The first issue emphasizes the integration of religious, national, and archaic themes and tendencies into one framework, and the second issue is agriculture and rural and traditional life at the beginning of modernity imported from the West.

Regarding the first issue, it seems that with the beginning of archaeological discoveries and the publication of news and pictures of pre-Islamic historical sites in Iran, alas, the ancient civilizations of Iran and the glory of the past were formed in the minds of the people and promoted by the government. On the other hand, the existence of dominant religious interests in society and religious symbols such as buildings related to Islamic culture similar to Soltanieh with their use has caused religious buildings to accompany historical and ancient buildings; in other words, national and religious symbols in four-season carpets.

Regarding the second issue and depicting rural and agricultural scenes that reflect the way of life and culture of Iranian society in the Qajar era, we can also see the position of artists in criticizing the destructive social and cultural changes in all aspects of society. Especially since all the visual and literary elements of the four-chapter designs have archaic historical and cultural references. It is as if the creators of these designs, by doing so, have consciously sought to reflect the intentions and desires of society through four-season carpets.

## Endnotes

1. In general, the first examples of surviving Iranian carpets with the complete design and role of the Islamic period are related to the Safavid era. A significant part of the existing carpets of the Safavid era is also related to carpets with Chaharbagh and garden designs. However, the use of Iranian garden themes and structures in painting has a long history.

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