

## Original Research Article

## Art Anthropology Study on Turkmen Handwoven and Handkerchiefs Motifs

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### Abstract

**Problem statement:** Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs are a field of native arts that, while meeting the needs of life and highlighting the artistic identity, have been a vehicle for revealing beliefs through the representation of abstract motifs. The critical point in these works is the importance and exceptional attention to the semantic and belief-oriented aspects of the motifs, along with the aesthetic dimension. This issue is relatively less in other nomadic societies. In the lifestyle of Turkmen society, there is a prominent presence of ancient (shamanic) and religious beliefs, rituals, and teachings that are presented to the audience through abstract artworks. Therefore, we can do an anthropological study on the Turkmen weavers' worldview, which presents in the paintings. This approach seeks to study and understand artworks' content in their creators' cultural context. So the central question of the research is, what are the anthropological characteristics of Turkmen handwoven and handkerchief motifs? And how can we study their semantics and aesthetics in terms of this aspect and Turkmen cultural contexts?

**Research objective:** This study attempts to examine and understand Turkmen's handmade motifs in the context of Turkmen weaving culture.

**Research method:** The type of this study is qualitative and developmental and its method is descriptive-analytical with a library data collection.

**Conclusion:** The dominant style of painting motifs is more discrete than abstract. Also, the motifs are created relying on beliefs more than they have aesthetics (decorative) and symbolic and semantic aspects. Most of the motifs include the group of protective motifs (prayer, spell, armband), ram, local birds, and flowers (bergamot) That has a special marker and form in each tribe. Also, handmade have special functions.

**Keywords:** *Turkmen, Art, Anthropology, Handwoven, Handkerchief.*

### Introduction

The Turkmen people are one of the Ili societies that have an internal structure that is regular and specific and limited to themselves. They are one of the different Ili tribes of Iran due to their specific tribal culture and actions, Islamic beliefs in

addition totemic rituals and beliefs (Shamanism). The expression of these ethnic and collective norms is clearly shown in the system of their handwoven and handkerchiefs. The works and motifs derived from Turkmen beliefs have anthropological, aesthetic, and semantic dimensions and diverse functions. The worldview of a Turkmen artist is full of collective and individual values and beliefs

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that play a constructive and pragmatic role in his life. The Turkmen society, both in ancient times and in the Islamic period, followed and adhered to these norms in all aspects of life with seriousness and firm belief. In this way, all the affairs and phenomena of his life are a platform for reflecting his heart and inner beliefs. Therefore, artworks such as handwoven and handkerchiefs are an area for designing, introducing, and keeping ideas and values alive. In fact, the patterning and decoration of Turkmen, rather than being derived from taste and feel, is an emphasis on remembering beliefs. Examining and analyzing the text and content of handwoven and handkerchiefs reveals different aspects of Turkmen culture. In this way, the anthropology of art is one of the most important approaches which able to discover the different layers of cultures that are related to artistic phenomena and show many cultural expressions in artistic action. Anthropology of art is a branch of anthropology that studies, examines, and analyzes the aesthetic, semantic, and functional aspects of works of art in the context of the culture that produced them. Therefore, the main question is how to analyze the aesthetic and semantic features of the designs and roles of Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs from the perspective of the anthropology of art and the fields of Turkmen culture. Also, the purpose of this research is to identify and introduce the design and roles and study them in the context of Turkmen culture through the anthropology of art.

## Research Method

This research is qualitative and fundamental and descriptive-analytical. Also, the data collection method is library type.

## Research background

Although not much research has been done about the anthropology of Turkmen art and handwoven, some books and articles have been written about the carpets of these people, which are introduced here. Boas (2012) in the book "Anthropology of Art" has studied, examined, and analyzed the

approach of the anthropology of art regarding the elements and components related to art and works of art (formal elements, style, symbolism, and symbolic representation). Bodaghi (1992) studied and investigated the technical and aesthetic aspects of Turkmen carpets in the book "Niyazjan and Turkmen carpets". Hasouri (1992) in the book "Turkmen Carpet Patterns and Neighboring Peoples", has studied and introduced the common design and patterns in Turkmen carpets and the neighboring peoples of this nation. Also, in the article "The Role of the Tree of Life in Turkmen Carpets with an Emphasis on Tree Motifs in Islamic Culture and Ancient Civilizations", Tomajnia and Tavousi (2006) investigated and studied the tree of life in ancient and Islamic culture and civilizations. Ayatollahi, Chitsazian, and Tomajnia (2007) studied, examined, and introduced the types of Turkmen Namazlighs (prayer mats) and their designs and roles in the article "Turkmeni Namazliq". Also, Kameli and Rahmani (2013) in the article "Turkmen Namazligh: A Discussion on Key and Ritual Symbols of Culture", study Namazliq, \_this identity-giving and practical element (for holding the ritual act of prayer) in social and cultural aspects and They have investigated and analyzed it, especially in terms of symbolic concepts, values, and ritual beliefs. Karimi, Baba-Ahmadi, Almasinia, and Mobini (2013) in the article "Structural and content analysis of Turkmen carpet, case study: a sample of Chowal Gol carpet", while studying and examining the technical and aesthetic aspects of Turkmen carpet, introduced and described a type of carpet called "Chowal Gol". Also, Yaghubzade (2017) in his article "Image signs in Turkmen Asmalighs", while introducing Asmaligh as one of the Turkmen handwoven, examined and introduced the motifs of this fabric. Jalali, Javani, and Ghani (2018) in the article "Introduction of some content and structural components of the Ghuchak motif in Turkmen rugs", have analyzed and investigated the Ghuchak motif from the perspective of form and content. In the book "Turkmen Carpets: Masterpieces of

the Art of the Vast Plains of Central Asia from the 10th to the 13th Century in the Hofmeister Collection” (Tzarova, 2017), Turkmen carpets have been researched from a technical and artistic point of view. In the book “Turkmen carpets: masterpieces of Steppe art from the 16th to the 19th centuries: the Hoffmeister collection” (ibid.), Turkmen carpets have been researched from a technical and artistic point of view. In this article, the Turkmen handwoven and handmade (felt) and especially the patterns that are the result of their beliefs are examined with the approach of art anthropology and paying attention to their aesthetic, semantic, and functional dimensions.

### History and Genealogy of Turkmen

The Turkmen, who are also called Ghazes or Oghuzes, are a branch of the Central Asian Turks who lived a nomadic life in the vast deserts between the SirDarya (Seyhun) and the Aral Sea since ancient times. Following the collapse of the Gog Turk Empire, a group of Oghuzes separated from them and moved from the Arkhoun region to Aral and SirDaria. During the time of Sultan Masoud of Ghaznavi, the Turkmen, who were livestock farmers, migrated to Gorgan in search of pasture” (Mansouri, 2008, 13). Iranian Turkmen live in the provinces of Mazandaran, Golestan (Bander Turkmen, Aqqal’e, Gonbad, Kalleh, Merave-tape, Jargolan, Gomishan,

Siminshahr, and Inchebrun), and North Khorasan (Raz and Jargolan region), Razavi Khorasan (Torbat Jam). During the time of Reza Shah and with the approach of development and settlement, many Turkmen changed their lifestyle and cultural dimensions by changing the nomadic way.

#### • The Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs

One of the most important fields in which the Turkmen tribes have a prominent and admirable presence is art and works of art. Native arts of weaving and felting, along with literature, music and singing, ornaments, and needlework, are among their most prominent traditional arts (Fig. 1). Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs are an expression of their ethnic identity and artistic heritage, which are produced and used to fulfill part of their daily needs. Although the change in lifestyle has had a significant effect on the amount and variety of these works, some of these works are still produced and used due to living in an open ecosystem and preserving a part of the tribal structure. Turkmen art products are divided into groups and subgroups as shown in Table 1. The most important Turkmen handwoven stuff include carpets, Namazligh, Ayatligh<sup>1</sup>, Asmaligh<sup>2</sup>, Ojaghbash<sup>3</sup>, Oukbash<sup>4</sup>, Sofreh, Khaligh<sup>5</sup>, Charlik, Angasi, saddlebags, spoon boxes, Quran boxes, rug, and horse blankets. Also, among felt works, Namazlighs are the most important products. It is one of the

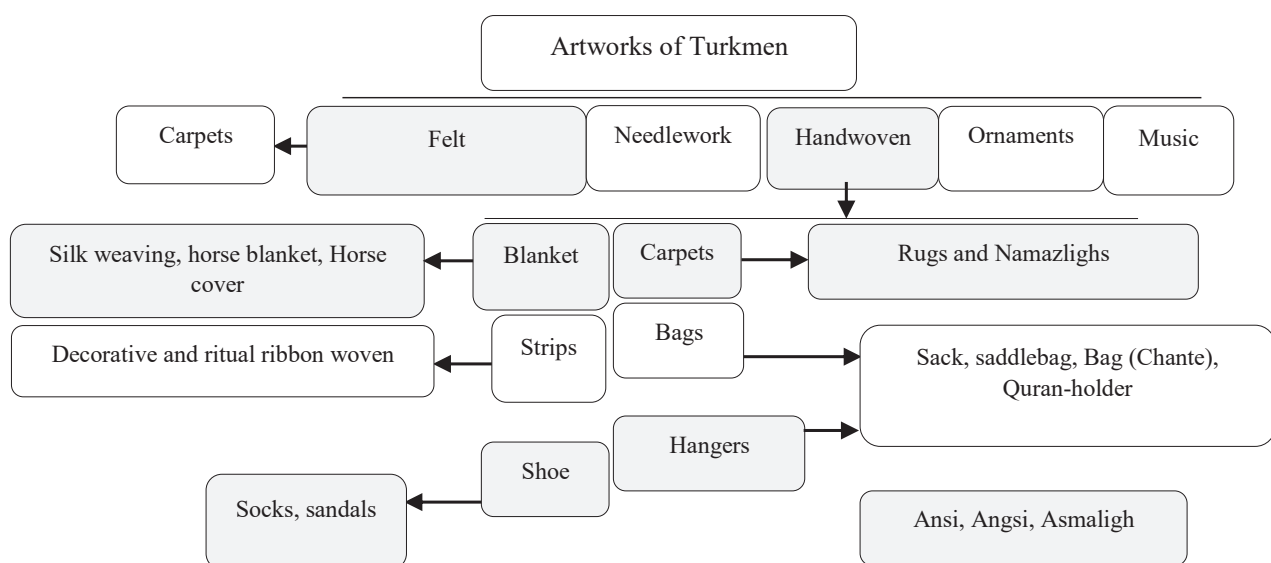


Fig. 1. Types of handwoven in Turkmen art. Source: Authors.

Table 1. Classification of types of handwoven and handkerchiefs and their subcategories. Source: Authors.

| Group         | Subcategories  |
|---------------|--|
| Knitting knot | Carpet, rug, Gharchin, prayer mat, side carpet, and all types of hanging carpets like saddlebags |
| Rug-wovens    | Includes all kinds of ground cloth and bags  |
| Felt weaving  | All kinds of felt products   |

most famous carpet designs of the Turkmen people, another name is the purdah (curtain), which is known among the Turkmen who live above the borders of Iran and Turkmenistan as Ansi carpet, a small carpet that hangs at the entrance of the residency. Felt (Keche or Kochme) is an underlay made of beaten and tangled wool, which is produced by rubbing by hand and through a difficult and exhausting process by Turkmen women (Fig. 2).

From the point of view of texture, Turkmen Namazlighs are produced in three ways: knitting knot (Chitme or Chatme), knitting rug (Faghma), and Felt (Basma). Their general form is a rectangular altar (wovens) and an oval (felts). Most of today's felt Namazlighs have lost their variety and only Namazlighs with ram's horn (Ghouchak) and yellow scorpion (Sari Ichian) designs are produced. With her long experience, the Turkmen woman artist creates patterns arising from the belief and culture of her environment in the context of the work. Cherial Samuel (1987) considers weaving to be a female art in which women "invent patterns" (Boas, 2012, 37). Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs, along with the aesthetic components of the design, pattern, color, and patterning style, are an important part of the artistic identity and visual values of these people. The pattern in these works is full of meanings and symbolic concepts that are inspired by totemic (Shamanic) and religious beliefs, taste, mind, and

nature. Fig. 3 shows the types of handwoven and felt products along with visual examples.

### Anthropology of art

"Anthropology of art studies the phenomenon of art in social and cultural applications and in its mental consequences within a culture and its components as well as among different cultures and ethnicities" (Fakuhi, 2018, 21). In this knowledge, artistic works and objects are shown in the form of "material signs and symbols of myths in literature, beliefs, customs, lifestyles, and behaviors" (ibid.). In the traditional view, anthropologists "studied art as a part of the culture of indigenous communities, Subjects such as dance, music, ritual, drama, architecture, decoration patterns, all kinds of designs and patterns used in handicrafts, ornaments, clothes, objects, and life accessories, and in general everything that showed the local taste and art in objective and material manifestations, were considered examples of native art" (Ebrahimi Zarandi, 2016, 6). In fact, the purpose of art anthropology is to "understand art from the point of view of its creator culture". "What does a work of art mean to its creators?" (Leach, 1967, 25). Therefore, the anthropology of art is "an approach that sees art as having a cultural context, and understanding art are not possible without knowing this context. An anthropologist needs to show how art objects are produced in the culture of a particular society and what function they have for that culture" (Shirani, Izdi Jeyran, Spooner & Kouhestani, 2017, 72). In fact, anthropology of art, with the attitude that art is a cultural product, uses and benefits from the element of "culture" in all its aspects with the aim of understanding the work of art as a tool. Based on this, artistic explorations are manifestations and associations of culture, which include "common and

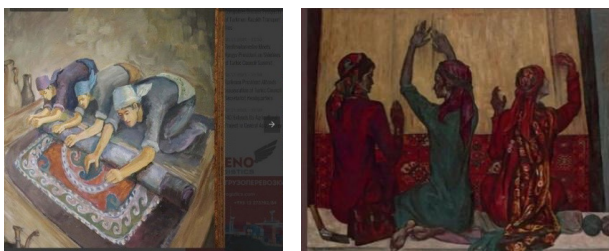


Fig. 2. Turkmen women are weaving carpets and rugs. [www.virgool.io/takbaf/www.traditionalshoes.com](http://www.virgool.io/takbaf/www.traditionalshoes.com)





Fig. 3. Picture examples of all kinds of Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs. Source: Authors.

learned patterns of behaviors, beliefs, and special feelings” (Ember & Ember, 1993, 466). Through the anthropology of art, the study, investigation, and analysis of every artistic work and object should be done in the context and the components of the same culture. Although, in the analysis and interpretation of artistic works and objects, in addition to the cultural background of the producer communities, we can consider the thought system, and attitudes of other ethnic groups and neighbors who influenced the source society. Because according to Boas, there is no society that heirs a predetermined culture. Every culture is generated by the elites who need it. It is either a combination of elements borrowed from neighbors that have been adapted or reinterpreted according to the existence of a new ultimate target (Boas, 2012, 20). Turkmen works of art, while meeting the essential needs of Turkmen society,

are interested in cultivating the taste and talent of creative artists to understand and recognize beauty. The anthropology of art in the present study tries to analyze Turkmen’s handwoven and handkerchiefs with the aim of understanding and identifying their shape and style structure, meaning, symbol, and type of use. The process of this review and study in native, ethnic, and applied arts is shown in Fig. 4.

### The Components of the Anthropological Subcategory of Art in Turkmen Handwoven and Handkerchiefs

Using its components, the anthropology of art seeks to discover the semantic, aesthetic, and functional characteristics of art and works of art. On this basis, Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs, having such formal and content values, are susceptible to study and investigation using these components

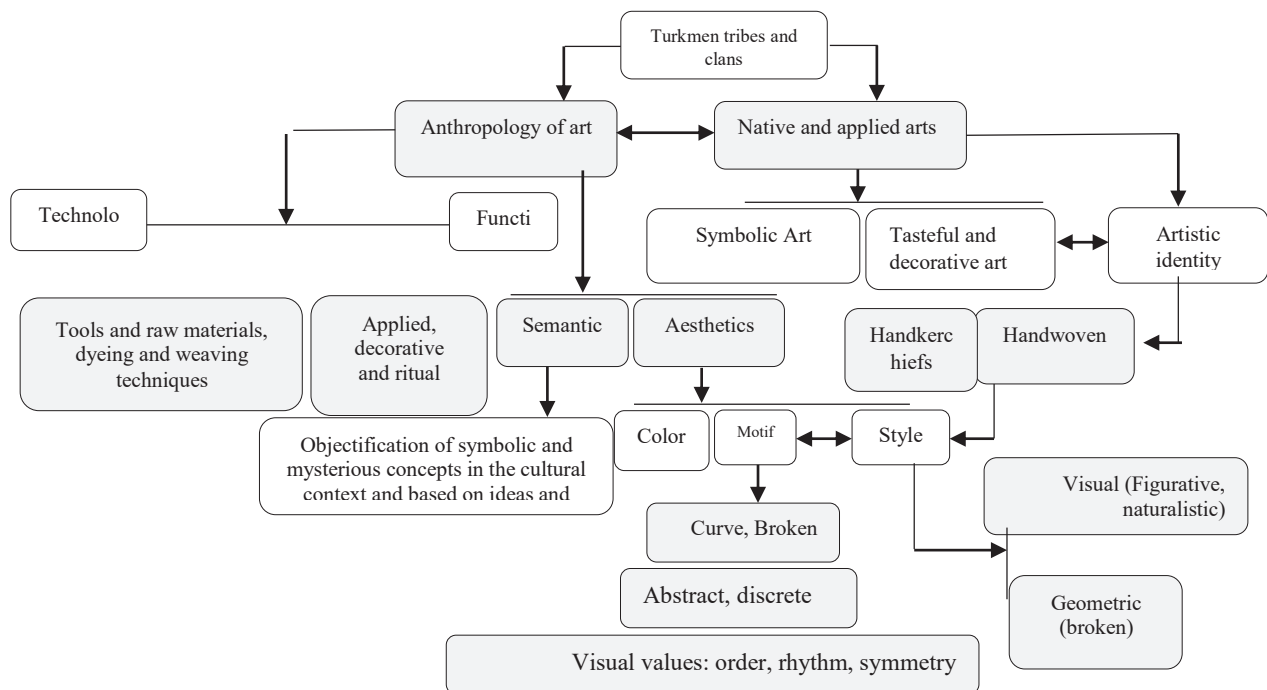


Fig. 4. Indigenous arts from the approach of art anthropology. Source: Authors.

which are examined, analyzed and introduced in this section along with various aspects of the anthropology of art.

#### • Aesthetics

In the anthropological approach to art, the aesthetic dimension includes systems consisting of style and patterns [and colors] that decorate the background of the work (handwoven and handkerchief). These elements should be interpreted and analyzed by the anthropological researcher in connection with the culture and ecosystem of the weaver artist. Murphy (2006) in the article “Aesthetics from a cross-cultural perspective”, examines aesthetics in the form of two types of material and non-material culture. In the case of material culture, aesthetics is subject to material characteristics such as form, composition, and sensory qualities. But the beauty of a thing can be subject to immaterial features such as the feature of the period, place, or supernatural essence of things. The ratio of material to non-material features is like the ratio of explicit and implicit meaning. To recognize and identify non-material features, one should pay attention to cultural recognition, and recognition of all types of beauty depends on the recognition of value standards. Therefore, aesthetics

determines how something feels, shows, and is received (ibid.). Therefore, to know and understand the material dimension of cultural products in the context of Turkmen culture, aesthetics, and elements such as pattern and color will be discussed from the point of view of form and style. And to understand the immaterial dimension (meanings and symbolic concepts), the semantic extent is explored. The criteria of beauty in Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs are qualitative and original experiences that can be seen in the self-taught artists of these people and the context of their culture and ecosystem. The aesthetic principles of these works have emerged in the long history of the creation of various motifs based on ancient totemic beliefs and Islamic teachings, the creative and imaginative mind, and the creators’ pure inner feelings have been with them in the process of designing and decorating and modern viewers and artists may perceive these works and designs very differently. Unfortunately, with the passage of time and changes in lifestyle, handwoven and handkerchiefs, which are the basis for the presence of aesthetic and semantic values, have been forgotten. As Bogolyubov pointed out this danger, he believed that in carpets [and

handwovens], we come across an aesthetic source of group work and effort that has accumulated over successive generations. The best and most beautiful of them have been preserved and if there is a danger lurking in these precious remnants of distant and ancient times, it is the conditions of civilization and its looting (Bogolyubov, 1977, 32).

### • Style

Style is an important part of the field of aesthetics, which is examined and analyzed the patterns in native arts. Boas (2012) believes about style: the style of mental processing results in a reality that is determined by the unconscious executive style of the members of the same society. Style depends on both the specific characteristics of the culture and the requirements related to the environmental structures. There are two ways to display the environment: one is to display the object as it is seen, and the other is to display the imagination and mental visualization. A distinction must be made between “purely visual” attitudes and “intellectual” attitudes that represent mental visualization \_things that we know exist but do not see\_ (Adam, 1959, 31; Severi, 1991, 83). Boas further writes referring to the connection between the designing and the technique: “First of all, we should not forget that these motifs initially show the type of process and the “work” in the background. Here again, we are dealing with a technical matter. Because patterns that are considered artistic images always have a characteristic combined with very strong technology. It should not be surprising that a certain technique affects a certain style” (Boas, 2012, 31). Therefore, in his opinion, in cases where the technique [weave style] plays a lesser role, it is less possible to develop realistic styles (ibid.). This is an emphasis on the effective role of weave techniques in the type and style of creation and representation of motifs. This phenomenon is one of the factors influencing the formation of motifs in nomadic handwoven<sup>6</sup>. “In general, two completely different concepts can be considered for style: First, style refers to the formal similarities of objects that the producer consciously shapes and the observer

or anthropologist observes and analyzes. But the second concept refers to similarities in which the producer of the work is unconsciously involved and is a follower in the transfer of technical skills, and it is only revealed to the external observer (Murphy, 2016, 47-48). Therefore, the woven motifs in Turkmen’s handwoven in the form of geometric shapes and forms (abstract and discrete) are placed in this stylistic group. Many anthropologists researching art, such as Riegel and Boas, declared their opposition to the views of the superiority of pictorial or figurative style (naturalist) over geometric style and believed that geometric style has full aesthetic value (Goldwater, 1966, 44). Based on this, to understand the style in Turkmen’s handwoven, it is necessary to analyze the special and visual characteristics such as symmetry, rhythm, and relationships between motifs and decoration, as well as their selected symbolic elements, and pay attention to their motif’s order. The reproduction of Turkmen motifs in the form of patterns is subject to the same sense of style, and Turkmen handwoven motifs in the form of geometric shapes and forms (abstract and discrete) are included in this stylistic group. “One of the basic features of the Illyrian designs is the geometric nature of designs. This patterning style is one of the oldest methods of weaving used among nomads. The most famous Illyrian paintings are produced among the Turkmens of Iran” (Vakili, 2012, 21). The stylistics of motifs in weaves and felts can be studied and analyzed based on the two components of “elements and composition”. In this plan, the “elements” and motifs of Turkmen weaves can be defined in the form of two elements, line, and color, and “composition” in the basic geometric shapes of motifs (circle, rhombus, triangle, square, and rectangle) in addition to line and color. In this plan, the “elements” and motifs of Turkmen weaves can be defined in the form of two elements, line, and color, and “composition” can be defined in the basic geometric shapes of motifs (circle, rhombus, triangle, square, and rectangle) beside line and color. In the patterning process, the weaver combines

lines and colors as well as the combination of different shapes in a balanced, logical, and orderly composition and format, which ultimately forms the style and structure of the artwork on a strong foundation of visual elements and qualities (Fig. 5), because in this process, skill, taste, and long-standing experience have contributed. The structure of motifs and especially flowers in Turkmen handwoven is a geometry that creates a special unity and composition with coexistence and qualitative order that is specific to these people. But in their felts, this procedure is different. These handkerchiefs follow limited motifs and curved structures. An important point in examining the geometric structure of Turkmen handwoven is the weaving technique. The geometric structure depends on the weaving techniques. "Weaving technique, the type of placement and involvement of yarn, weft, and lint influence the canvas of hand-woven fabric and the appearance and practical characteristics of it. weaving techniques are the most important factor in the creation of drawings and designs, and actually, the engineering of the weaving process. Without weaving techniques, no design or patterning, even in summary, abstract, and morphological refinements, will be possible on the handwoven surface" (Afrough, Javani, Chitsazian & Qashghaifar, 2017, 83). Therefore, it can be said that the stylistics based on the geometric structure in Turkmen weavings is influenced by weaving techniques.

### • Pattern and color element

The visual nature of art finds meaning in the pattern and color system. These two overlapping elements continuously cause an aesthetic experience and meaning in nomadic works and give them an artistic aspect. And therefore, some of them are kept as exquisite works and masterpieces in prestigious world collections. "The pattern of Iranian weavers is the only fundamental element that is always taken into consideration" (Hangedin, 2015, 39). The motifs in nomadic handwoven have a geometric nature and are made in an abstract and discrete form inspired by the thoughts and beliefs, nature, and the imaginative mind of the weaver, along with the experimental selection of colors on the background of the fabric. These motifs have decorative, belief-oriented, and semantic functions in Turkmen society. "In their initial visual expression, they refer to a kind of decoration that creates a delicate and beautiful feeling in a person. But many of these motifs, in addition to being decorative, contain symbolic concepts that are presented in these beautiful forms. Some carpet motifs were purely decorative and some were invented by the uninformed weaver due to their symbolic aspect. In such a way that most of the weavers are still unaware of the symbolic aspect of the shapes they weave" (Parham, 2019, 32). Symbolic motifs in Turkmen weavings are formed based on the repetition of one or more motifs in the space of the work. The nature of motifs in nomadic weaves is "abstract and discrete". These two

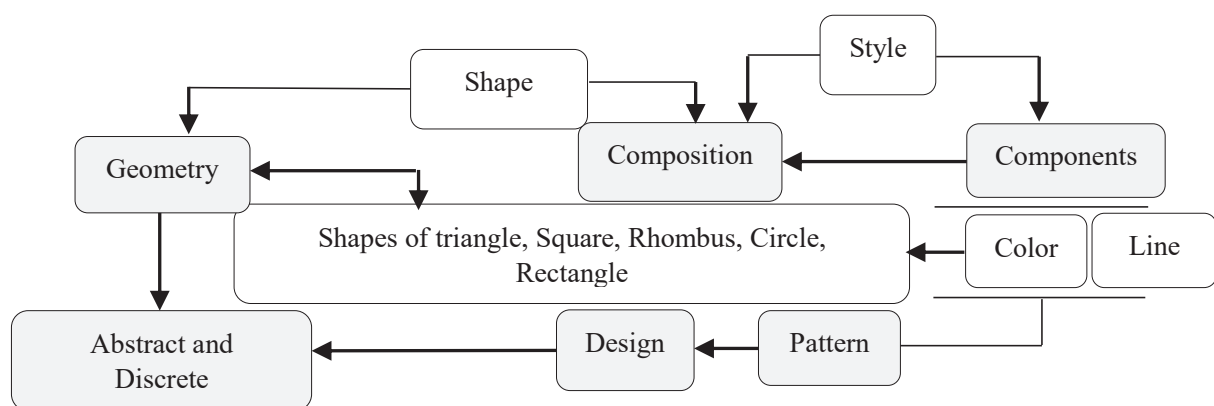


Fig. 5. Stylology of Turkmen handwoven and handkerchief motifs based on elements and composition. Source: Authors.



concepts are different from each other in the visual field due to the form of the motifs.

#### • The “Discrete” nature of Turkmen motifs

Although the artists of the 20th century used the word “abstraction” for works that “avoid naturalism, transform natural phenomena into a simplified form, imitate the reality of objects and are far from showing the reality of objects” (Pakbaz, 2018, 652-3), But the nomadic weaver is aware of this characteristic in an experimental way, without learning or going to school. Because her goal is to transform the simple forms around life into kinetic and dynamic visual forces. In creating abstract motifs, the weaver’s effort is to summarize and dress up a pattern and minimize it. “For example, she paints the shape of a peacock, a chicken, a rooster, or a duck in the minimum formal and apparent reality. In such a way that the structure and main foundation, shape or form of the animal or bird are preserved” (Afrough et al., 2015, 86). In these pictures, the basic similarity with external reality is preserved. In nomadic weaves, motifs are often of an abstract nature (Fig. 6). The word Discrete (Tajrid in Persian) means “seclusion, to clear, a mental science that attends to an attribute of something or a part of its semantic

components and neglects other attributes while the first component or attribute cannot exist alone and independently (Moin, 2002, 726). Therefore, Turkmen weavers “in their view of nature, extracted some motifs with a basic and central attitude and transformed them to the point where they lost their identity and they arrived at a basic shape and form. They have avoided any kind of mere objectification in their art” (Ebrahimi Naghani, 2014, 29). In discrete motifs, there is no similarity in appearance and form to the external example of the pattern. The important point is that the motifs in Iranian nomadic handwoven are less of the “discrete” type and often of the “abstract” type. However, in Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs, the majority of motifs (with the exception of some limited cases) are of a discrete type (not similar to the external principle) (Fig. 7).

motifs are not self-contained, In the process of objectification, but are influenced by an external or internal phenomenon such as imagination or nature and the weavers’ living environment. “Nomads basically have woven carpets mentally and memorizing throughout history. in such a way, limited patterns taken from nature have been passed



Fig. 6. The limited abstract motif (camel) in Turkmen textiles and the abstract motif of the lion in Qashqai textiles. Source: www.firstrugs.com/products

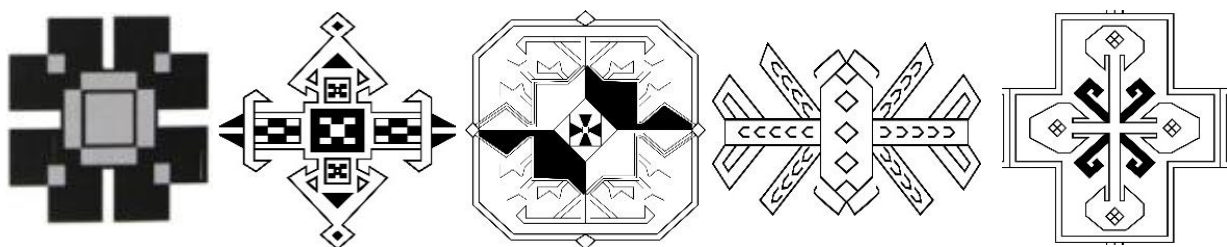


Fig. 7. From right to left: discrete motifs of dolls, spoons, elephant legs, and frogs (in Turkmen) and discrete motifs of Almagul or apple blossom (in Qashqai). Source: Hasouri, 1992.

down from mothers to daughters. Therefore, this is not the correct thinking if we imagine that these motifs are constantly changing and go beyond the predetermined conventions” (Hasouri, 2011, 21). Turkmen women and girls are skilled artists and painters. They believe: “These patterns are the legacy of our ancestors, in which they displayed sadness, joy, longing and regret” (Ezatollahinejad, 2020, 246). Colors, along with patterns, are another aspect of the aesthetic and graphic dimension of the pattern. Colors in Turkmen weaves and felts are limited and few. These colors are warm and sometimes semi-warm. they use less cold and semi-cold colors. Red color, which is called Qizil in Turkmen and is considered the happiest color, is the most dominant color in Turkmen culture and art, especially in the field of carpets. Because the living environment of Turkmens is cold and the presence of warm and vibrant red color warms the house both spiritually and visually. Brown, yellow, blue, gray, green, and sometimes black colors are also used. The classification of Turkmen handwoven motifs and handkerchiefs and some of their pictorial forms are shown in Fig. 8 and Fig. 9.

• **The motif of the flower (Gul): the most extensive motif and identity element of the Turkmen weaving culture**

The designs and patterns of Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs are limited and definite, unlike other clans and nomads who have diversity in subject classification which as a result of repeating or changing the structure of one motif, another motif has emerged. The characteristic of Turkmen carpet design and patterns is the motif of Gul (flower), which is the most important pattern in their knot woven. And according to Hasouri: “Turkmen’s Chamche (as same as Iranian bergamot) repeated in their carpets. The main Gul (flower) of each tribe is different from another tribe. Some Guls, such as “Qarq Qochaq” (forty young men), “Gilin Barmagh” (bride’s finger), show that the young men of the tribe protect their honor” (Hasouri, 2011, 29). The motif of a Gul appears as an identity element in Turkmen

carpets, which is octagonal in terms of form and body but in terms of content, it has variety and difference. This pattern has twenty different forms, in such a way that every clan, tribe, and even family has a special type that is their representative and symbol (Fig. 10). But nowadays, many of them have been forgotten due to the change in lifestyle and the passage of time. Turkmens have mutually used various elements and details of motifs in the design of floral motifs. There is a two-way and multiple relationships between the motifs. For example, in the creation and composition of some Guls, the motif of bird, ram, goose’s foot, congress, and flint are used. Guls in Turkmen art are such a wide system and range that every motif is known with the suffix “Gul”. Such as Mari (snake) Gul, GhbseGul, Ayna (mirror)Gul, DornaghGul, FilpiGul, Oghab(eagle) Gul, ChouvalGul, ChmcheGul, Salourgul, etc.

• **Semantic (belief-oriented aspects of motifs)**

The semantic dimension and discovering the meanings of symbolic images and motifs is one of the most important components in the anthropology of art studies. Therefore, “what is important for the anthropologist is to understand the meaning of the object in the context of the productive culture. In the study of art, we analyze the meaning of motifs in the context, because the forms contain the contextual experience (Scott-Hoy, 2003, 268). Because “art forms belong to the artist, but meanings belong to the wider community whose demands create the set of patterns and then use the ability of artists to produce them” (Biebuyk, 1969, 11). Prominent researchers such as Forg and Mann based their anthropological studies on the axis of the semantic system and the link between form, meaning, and function in the context and culture of society. Transferring and introducing concepts and meanings hidden in symbolic patterns and motifs in the form of a semantic system is a mission that is the responsibility of the anthropology of art. Art is an independent communication system in which meaning is structured, and in the interpretation of patterns, they should be viewed as multi-valued designs and

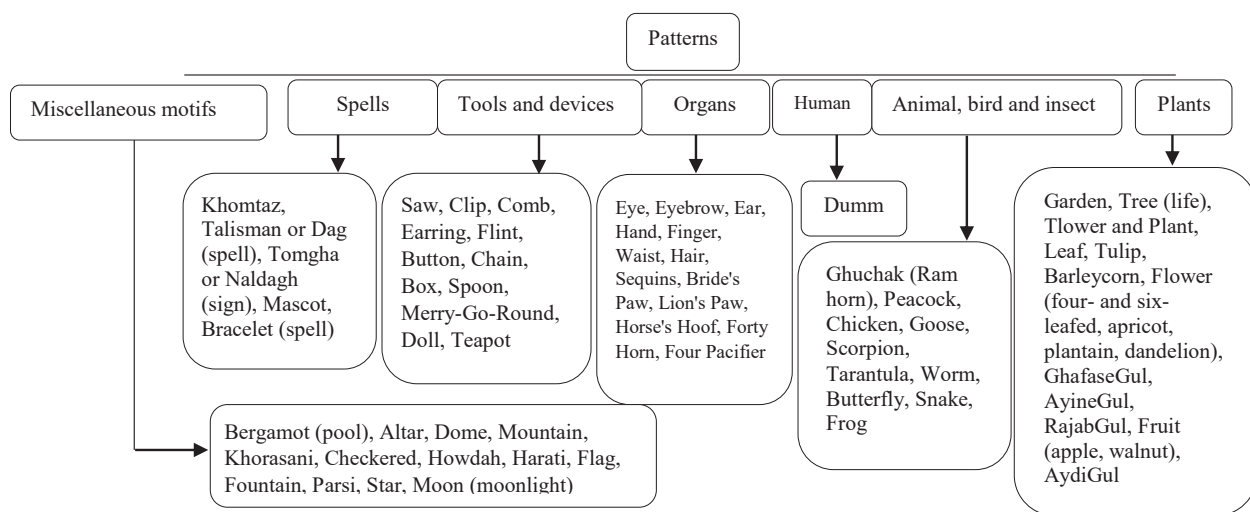


Fig. 8. Types of motifs in Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs. Source: Authors.

motifs. Motifs have symbolic meanings. Therefore, some meanings are explicit and some are symbolic or implicit. Sometimes the painted motifs in the field of Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs are a representation of the outside world. Therefore, we should discover the meaning of the form which references the outside world. On the other hand, some motifs have just a decorative function and their meaning does not have a referential nature. Therefore, we can't look for the external manifestations of all motifs in the objective space. The studied works of Turkmen, through symbolic motifs, reflect individual and ethnic perceptions and beliefs that have emerged in the context of the culture of these people. "Humans were always looking for a way to record and convey their ideas, beliefs, feelings, and thoughts, and until the invention of calligraphy, they used the language of images and pictorial motifs. Symbols always carry concepts that express the attitude and beliefs of the nation; Therefore, by gaining knowledge and understanding of the meaning and content of these motifs, one can gain a wealth of information about [the Turkmen people] and different regions" (Shirani et al., 2017, 73). Therefore, cultural elements such as "tradition, imitation, and customs are elements that are important in the design of shapes, forms, and even motifs, and are inherited

from generation to generation. And it is preserved as a special aesthetic tradition" (ibid., 74). In this way, works of art in the Turkmen tribal society are a diagram of a semantic whole made of local knowledge and technique, whose meaning and concepts are very important for the people of that society and culture. Therefore, the interpretation and analysis of the motifs are a central issue in the study and approach of the anthropology of art. In handwoven and handkerchiefs, "each pattern contains various symbols and meanings which influenced by ethnic beliefs or from other cultures. These motifs, in addition to their functional and decorative practicals, play a key role in conveying the core meanings and values of culture. And most of them are symbolic signs which have become abstract over time" (Mounesi Sorkhe, Afrashte & Yousefi, 2021, 140). One of the most important and different aspects of the creation of motifs in Turkmen works of art is the semantic aspects and the attitude of belief. Unlike other nomads, for whom motifs have more of an aesthetic aspect, the religious aspects of motifs are more prominent in Turkmen. Therefore, motifs often reflect Turkmen beliefs rather than decoration. There is always a two-way relationship between beliefs and ideas and "designs and motifs in the text of handwoven [and handmades]. Because beliefs are the reason

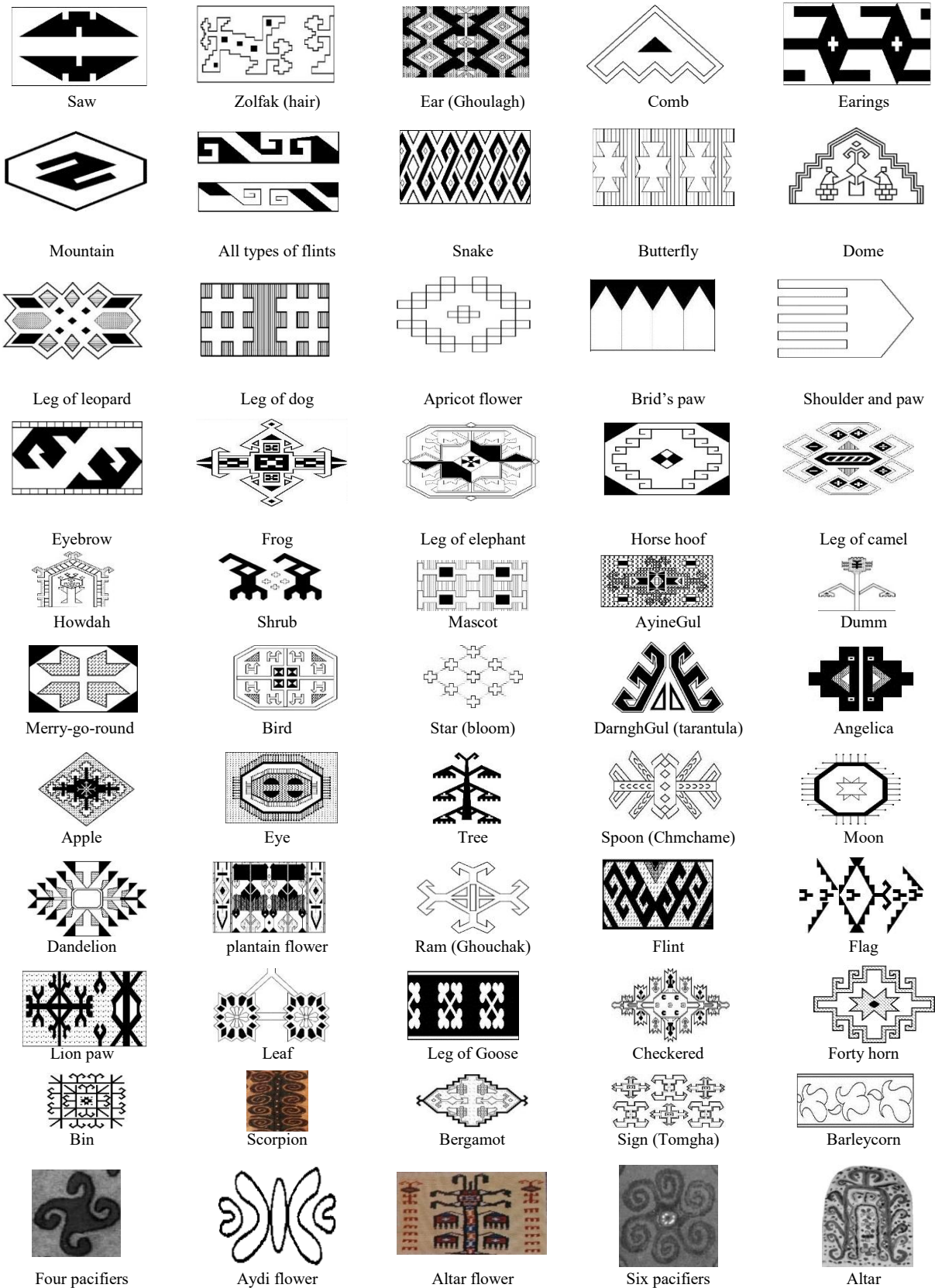


Fig. 9. Redesigned meaning-oriented motifs in Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs. Source: Hasouri, 1992; Tomajnia et al., 2016, 55-60.



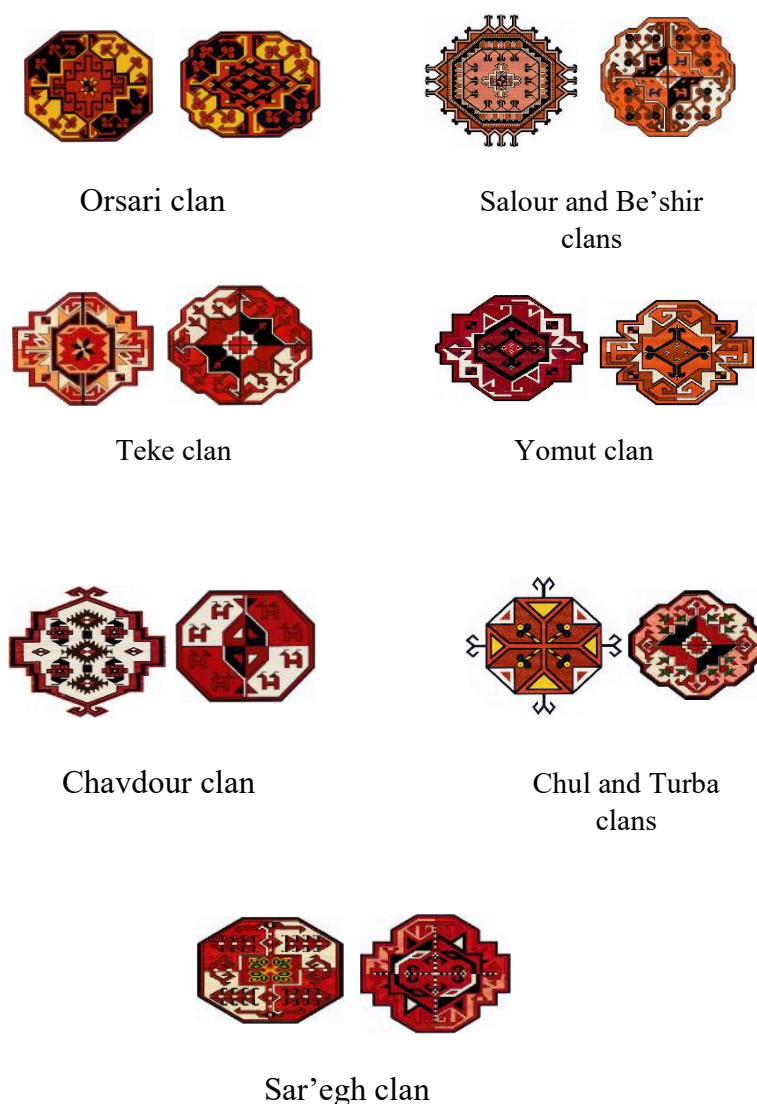


Fig. 10. Types of Gul motifs in the handwoven fabrics of Turkmen clans. Source: [www.masterniazi.com](http://www.masterniazi.com).

for the formation of all kinds of motifs in the handwoven text, and on the other hand motifs have always evoked and reminded the thoughts and beliefs in the mind of the viewer” (Afrogh, 2018, 82). Beliefs and ideas are one of the most important drivers for the creation of motifs in Turkmen’s handwoven and handkerchiefs. All kinds of Chshm-Zakhm (eye-wound) motifs, talismans (Alghams), and amulets, bracelets (scrolls), in many forms, are examples of belief-oriented motifs. Chesh-Zakham “in popular culture, is the hurt or sting that a person sees from someone else’s eyes (enemy or envious). A person whose eyes are believed to have a bad

effect is called an evil eye (Bad-Cheshm, Shour-Cheshm, and Chesh-Resan in Persian), and his actions are called eye-gazing (Cheshm Zadan and Cheshm Resandan in Persian). To avoid and protect a person from harm by Cheshm-Zakhm, they use amulets, spells, and things such as cowry, Spand, poultice, sacrifice, or breaking eggs. And the phrase “May the evil eye far away from you (Cheshm Be Dour in Persian)”, and “In the name of God (Be-Nam-e-Izad in Persian)”, or the like (Afzal Tousi & Sanji, 2016, 78). An example of Turkmen belief is related to the pattern of Sari-Ichan (yellow scorpion), which is very common in Turkmen felts and rugs (Fig. 11). Turkmen

women “in order to fight with[and avoid injury] from the scorpion, locate this motif to the edge of the carpet, and the scorpion retreats as soon as it sees its image (Ayatollahi, Chitsazian & Toomajnia, 2007, 55). Among the other prominent and important motifs in Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs, we can refer to the motifs of Ghuchak, Gul-Aidi, and Altar. The image of a ram or a ram’s horn has a religious and semantic place in the eyes of Turkmen and is often woven symbolically. This motif symbolizes the male gender, courage, and masculinity (Fig. 12). The symbolic motif of Gul-Aydi (flower) is also very sacred among Turkmen and it is used in Turkmen woven. This flower has nine petals. The number 9 is auspicious and blessed in Turkmen culture. They perform important life activities such as celebrations and rituals on the days that end with the number nine in the month (19th, 29th). They celebrate the birth of a child in 9 months and 9 days. Also, the dowry of a girl in the Turkmen language is called “Doghouz” and its meaning is the number 9 (Fig. 13). The symbolic motif of the altar (the gate of heaven) is also the main design element in Turkmen’s Namazlighs which is abundantly used

in handwoven, especially rugs and handkerchiefs along with other motifs (Fig. 14). Motifs in Turkmen artworks and handicrafts have a religious and ritual function, which is evident in motifs related to amulets and talismans. Turkmen motifs always appear in the form of geometric and especially abstract and mysterious forms. In this section, visual examples of the multitude of Turkmen handwoven motifs and handkerchiefs, which have a semantic and ritual load, are introduced.

### • Function

Another component that is interpreted in the anthropological system of art is the function aspect that can be observed in [Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs] and their motifs (Afrogh, 2021, 314). The feature of the function is one of the effective components in the creation of a hand-woven and finally its form or shape. In traditional and nomadic societies, no product exists or is created without necessity and use. The interconnectedness and interweaving of the function, meaning, and beauty dimensions in native and traditional arts are always the basic principle. This characteristic is well visible in Turkmen’s works of art, and function and



Fig. 11. The yellow scorpion in Turkmen felt and rug. Source: Author using Rahmani & Kameli, 2013, 80.



Fig. 12. Examples of the Ghouchak (Ram) pattern in Turkmen handwoven. Source: Jalali et al., 2017, 37.



Fig. 13. Gul-Aidi motif in Turkmen wove. Source: www.bayragh.ir/modules/smartsection.



Fig. 14. The motif of the altar, Ram’s horn, hand, and the tree of life in Turkmen Namazlighs. Source: pinterest.com/ford, 2002: 316.

beauty occur together. “In the traditional world, the relationship between function and beauty in an artwork is not additional. Beauty in this type of art is along the function. At the lowest level, a thing has the intended use, and the more it is upgraded, the more useful it becomes and the more beautiful it becomes” (Beheshti, 2012, 141). We can safely say that the most diverse handwoven from the functional aspect (decorative, practical, ritual) belong to Turkmens and they are divided into all kinds of rugs, blankets, bags, and functional and decorative strips. In Turkmen culture and art, all kinds of handwoven are produced based on their diverse function, and in addition to Fig. 1 and

Table 1 Fig.3, some items are also mentioned in Unfortunately, many of these weaves have been lost due to the change in lifestyle of the Turkmens. In the end, the summary of this research based on anthropology is shown in Fig. 15.

Some Turkmen handwoven from the point of view of function:

- Namazligh or prayer mat
- Ayatligh: a braid that is drawn on the deceased after death.
- Wide decorative strips
- Door-hanging (Dowr-Dari in Persian) to protect Cheshm-Zakhm
- Stool cover (Ru-korsi in Persian)

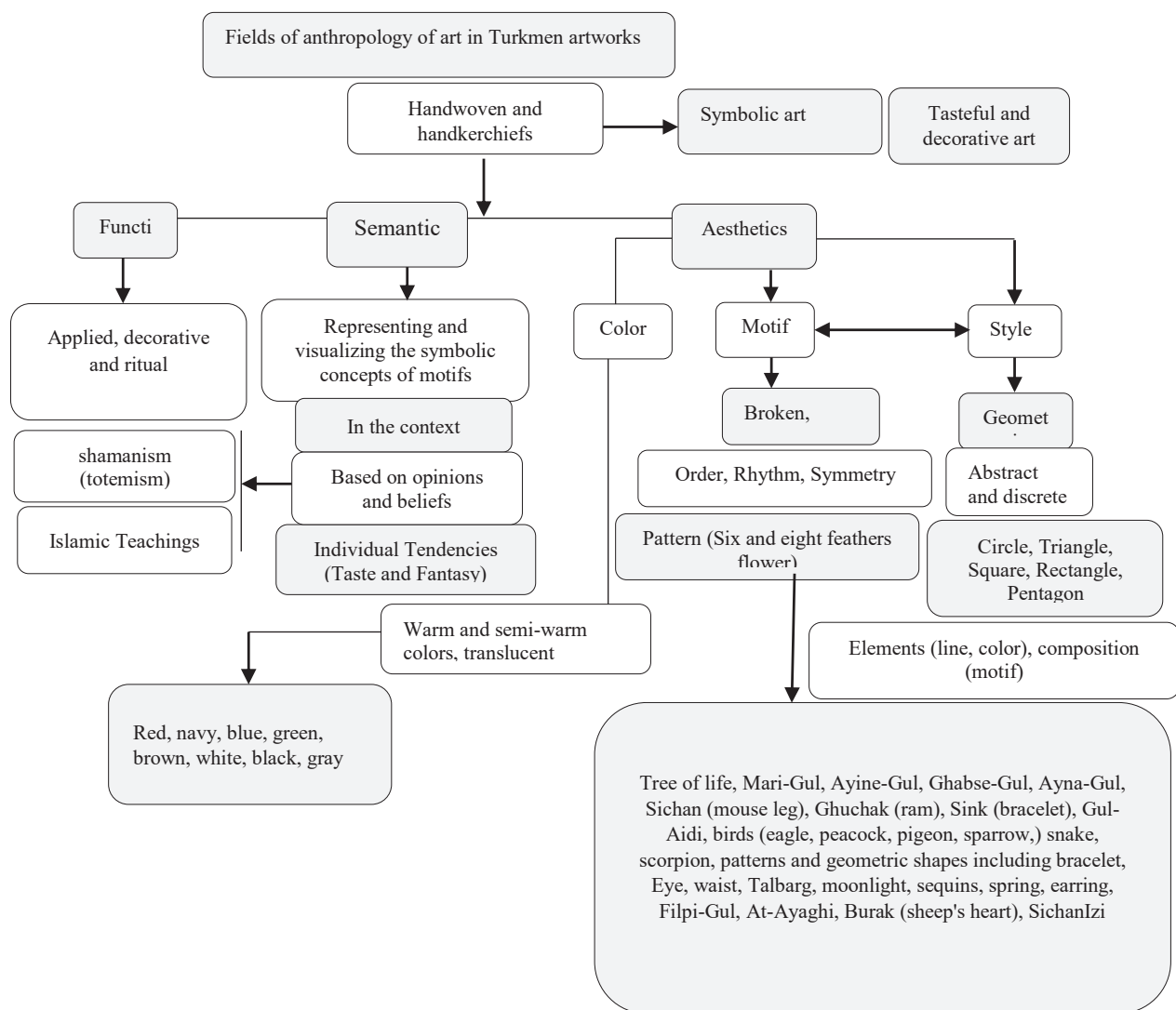


Fig. 15. Turkmen handwoven and handkerchiefs from the perspective of art anthropology. Source: Authors.

- Khaligh: A piece for the installation to decorate the front of the camel's chest or the entrance door.
- Asmaligh: A kind of decorative braid that is used in special ceremonies (weddings) to decorate a horse or camel for carrying the bride. The motif of the camel caravan "due to the cheerfulness of this animal, in the belief of the Turkmen people, is an omen on the wedding handwoven. Sometimes a horse is woven next to this camel caravan, which is a symbol of the groom who rides after the bride" (Yaghubzade, 2017, 127).
- bread table
- Charlik or the cover of the saddle
- Dizturba for keeping salt or sugar
- Gharchin: A type of cushion that is woven as a carpet
- Ojaghbash: A piece of carpet to spread around the stove or oven inside the tent
- Darghbash: Small pentagonal bag for keeping the comb
- Irkelik (Tasharlik): Varieties of horse covers that mostly have a curved shape
- Oukbashi or Oughbashi: a bag woven like a carpet for carrying Gazebo wood.

## Conclusion

This article, attempted to examine and analyze the handwoven motifs and handkerchiefs of the Turkmen people, relying on the anthropological approach. The structure and purpose of this approach are to study and understand works of art and their images from aesthetic, semantic, and functional aspects in the cultural context of society and from the artist's point of view. This article, attempted to examine and analyze the handwoven motifs and handkerchiefs of the Turkmen people, relying on the anthropological approach. Therefore, in the process of studying and examining these works from the perspective of art anthropology, it was found that paintings have a constructive role in revealing the ritual-shamanic and religious beliefs of the Turkmen people. Therefore, beliefs form an important part of the culture of these

people, and works of art, especially handwoven and handkerchiefs, are an important platform for reflecting the innermost thoughts and wishes of Turkmen weavers. The "semantic and symbolic" aspect of motifs in these works is preferred over the aesthetic and functional dimensions. Such motifs are created based on ideas and beliefs before they have an aesthetic aspect (decoration) and they have a symbolic and semantic aspect. In addition, the predominant style of rendering is discrete motifs (dissimilarity to the external sample) rather than abstract. It may be said that one of the important reasons for the reflection of the majority of motifs in the form of discrete (which is one of the characteristic features of motifs in Turkmen art) is these beliefs. which has a serious and to some extent "healing" presence in all aspects of Turkmen life, and motifs are an excuse and an arena for reflecting beliefs. This attitude is visible in the important part of the classification of motifs, including the category of protective motifs (such as amulets and [Dagh, Tomgha], bracelets, scrolls, Khomtaz, hanging-talisman, and flints), which are used to ward off danger and protect its owner. In addition to protective motifs, the main motifs of these works are flowers (Gul, bergamot), Ghouchak (ram), local birds, tarantulas, and Gul-Aidi, which have a special sign and form in each clan and tribe. Handwovens have special functions in addition. The floral pattern, which is more complicated with more details, has a special shape in each clan and tribe. The motifs are more of the type of tools and tribal symbols (Gul) rather than animals, birds and plants, and humans. On the other hand, instead of the general shape of the animal or bird, it shows a part of its body; such as Mari-Gul (the snake's flower), elephant leg or leopard leg. Of course, not naturally or abstractly, but in a discrete and completely strange and unfamiliar form, which is the special style of Turkmen role-playing. Also, Turkmen handmade have different functional-ritual aspects and some of them are woven based on a ritual or ceremony (bride dowry, covering the



deceased, gift to pilgrims), such as Namazligh, Asmaligh, and Ayatliq.

## Endnotes

1. A cloth that is put on the deceased after death
2. This type of weaving is woven in pairs by the bride herself, which in a way shows his expertise in carpet weaving to the groom's family.
- 3.. A carpet that is woven to spread around the stove or oven inside the tent.
4. Woven bags like carpets to carry wood for gazebos.
5. A piece is installed to decorate the front of the camel's chest or to decorate the entrance door.
6. See Afrough et al., 2016.

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