Bagh-e Nazar
DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2026.574989.5992

Bagh-e Nazar, *23*(162), 45-62 / 2026
Persian translation of this paper entitled:
بازنگری در پارادایم فرش ایران در دوران معاصر
با استناد به فرش‌های نوسنت‌گرا
is also published in this issue of journal.

Original Research Article

Revisiting the Iranian Carpet Paradigm in the Contemporary Era
Evidence from Neo-Traditional Carpets*

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Received: 17/02/2026 Accepted: 11/07/2026 Available online: 22/11/2026

Abstract

Problem statement: The Iranian Carpet Paradigm constitutes a network of discourses, conventions, bodies of knowledge, and beliefs that has historically shaped and constrained the understanding and interpretation of Iranian carpets through established conceptual frameworks and normative criteria. During the second half of the fourteenth century SH (Solar Hijri), this paradigm underwent a significant transformation with the emergence of new categories of carpets. Examining these developments within their historical, social, and cultural contexts provides a more comprehensive understanding of the evolution of contemporary Iranian carpets. Against this background, the present study investigates recent transformations in Iranian carpet production and offers a critical interpretation of the conditions that have given rise to these developments. It addresses the following questions: Why, and through what processes, has the Iranian carpet departed from its dominant paradigm in the contemporary era? Furthermore, what formal transformations distinguish neo-traditional carpets from conventionally recognised authentic carpets in terms of design and colour?

Research objective: This study aims to examine the trans-paradigmatic transformations of Iranian neo-traditional carpets during the second half of the fourteenth century SH and to investigate the factors that have contributed to their departure from the structural framework and normative standards of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm.

Research method: This study is fundamental in purpose and qualitative in approach. Data were collected through documentary research and fieldwork, including direct observation and the examination of selected carpet samples, and were analysed using a descriptive-analytical method.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that the emergence of new discourses-particularly those of contemporaneity, innovation, and consumerism-together with evolving consumer needs and preferences, has fundamentally reshaped the trajectory of Iranian carpet production and facilitated the emergence of new categories of carpets. Evolving through the dynamic interaction between tradition and contemporaneity, neo-traditional carpets demonstrate that contemporary Iranian carpet production can no longer be adequately understood solely within the conceptual and normative framework of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. Consequently, the concepts of beauty and authenticity in Iranian carpets are being fundamentally redefined.

Keywords: *Iranian carpet paradigm, Tradition, Change and rupture, Neo-traditional carpets, Contemporary Iranian carpets*

* This article is extracted from "Peyvand Tofighi"'s doctoral dissertation entitled "A Revision of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm Based on Works and Achievements in the 14th Century AH" which has been done under supervision of Dr. "Alireza Taheri" and of "Bijan Arbabi" at Faculty of Theoretical Sciences & Higher Art Studies, Iran University of Art, Tehran, in 2026.

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Introduction and Problem Statement

The Iranian Carpet Paradigm comprises a network of discourses, representations, beliefs, conventions, theories, regulations, methods, techniques, objectives, bodies of knowledge, and even research rationales that has gradually evolved under the influence of Orientalist and traditionalist perspectives. Over time, it has shaped the understanding and interpretation of Iranian carpets by confining them within established conceptual frameworks and normative criteria.

Accordingly, numerous scholars have identified specific characteristics that define authentic carpets. Ahmad Daneshgar (2005, 97) describes the qualities of an authentic carpet as the harmonious proportions of its dimensions; the balanced relationship between the border and the field in terms of size, design, and colour; adherence to the traditions of carpet weaving; the incorporation of the weavers' beliefs, customs, and cultural practices into the design; and the overall harmony of colours. Other scholars have similarly emphasised the worldview embodied in carpet design. For instance, Ali Hassouri (2006, 21) argues that "Iranian carpet designs are rooted in myths, rituals, religion, and popular beliefs". Likewise, Michael C. Hillmann[1] maintains in Persian Carpets that Iranian carpet designs express a distinctive culture and worldview (Zhuleh, 2002, 25).

The naturalisation of this understanding, reinforced by an unquestioned body of inherited knowledge, has constrained the recognition of alternative possibilities within the Iranian carpet tradition. In recent decades, however, carpet scholarship has expanded considerably, established definitions have been reinterpreted throughout the fourteenth century SH, and Iranian carpets have entered new conceptual and practical domains.

Processes of globalisation, the expansion of communication and information networks, increasing intercultural exchange, the rise of consumer culture, and transformations in lifestyles and worldviews have repositioned the Iranian carpet within a fundamentally different cultural context. Consequently, the emergence of new categories of carpets has challenged many of the long-standing assumptions underlying the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. Among these developments is a category of carpets that draws upon the traditional designs and colour palettes of Iranian carpets while no longer conforming to their established conventions and evaluative criteria. In the present study, this category is identified for the first time as neo-traditional carpets. These works exhibit characteristics that extend beyond the Iranian Carpet Paradigm and are therefore regarded as trans-paradigmatic. Understanding them requires moving beyond the assumptions of the dominant classical carpet paradigm. Recognising the limitations of this paradigm in the contemporary era thus provides the basis for its critical re-evaluation.

Accordingly, this study examines the trans-paradigmatic transformations of Iranian neo-traditional carpets during the second half of the fourteenth century SH and investigates the factors that have contributed to their departure from the structural framework and normative standards of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm.

A re-examination of the history of Iranian carpets reveals that many contemporary works have either received little scholarly attention or been dismissed as manifestations of a destructive trend. As a result, the contemporary history of Iranian carpets continues to contain significant research gaps. Many carpets produced during the new century, despite representing important developments in Iranian carpet production, continue to be evaluated according to the standards of the classical carpet paradigm. Consequently, neither their distinctive characteristics nor their broader significance has been adequately understood. By critically re-examining the assumptions underlying the Iranian Carpet Paradigm, this study focuses on a distinct category of contemporary carpets, identified here as neo-traditional carpets, and seeks to address part of this research gap. If we accept that no phenomenon or body of knowledge remains permanently governed by a single paradigm, it becomes possible to recognise both the limitations of the classical carpet paradigm and the necessity of revisiting it. Without a renewed conceptual framework capable of interpreting these works, Iranian carpet scholarship risks intellectual stagnation and gradual decline in the years to come.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. Why, and through what processes, has the Iranian carpet

departed from its dominant paradigm in the contemporary era?

2. What formal transformations distinguish neo-traditional carpets from conventionally recognised authentic carpets, particularly with respect to design and colour?

Research Methodology

The fourteenth century SH (Solar Hijri) witnessed profound structural and institutional transformations whose impact on Iranian carpet production cannot be overlooked. Accordingly, the study of contemporary Iranian carpets requires moving beyond the artefacts themselves to examine the broader social and cultural contexts that have shaped their transformation. Despite its significance, this dimension has received relatively limited scholarly attention.

In recent decades, the Iranian carpet market has witnessed the emergence of a wide range of new carpet categories characterised by considerable formal and conceptual diversity. Among these, neo-traditional carpets have gained particular prominence owing to both their diversity and their increasing acceptance in the market, and are now produced and distributed by numerous collections. Consequently, the statistical population of this study is limited to this specific category. The re-examination of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm is therefore based exclusively on neo-traditional carpets produced by two collections, Aria Deljavan[1] and Ahad Azimzadeh[2], both of which emerged during the contemporary period.

To identify and evaluate these transformations, seventy neo-traditional carpets were initially selected as representative trans-paradigmatic works for qualitative observation based on predetermined selection criteria. Subsequently, twenty-one carpets were purposively selected from this population as the analytical sample to identify the frequency of the observed characteristics and examine the principal patterns of transformation.

The defining characteristics of authentic Iranian carpets were first transcribed through documentary research. The principal components of design and colour in authentic Iranian carpets were then systematically compared with those of neo-traditional carpets. The primary criterion for sample selection was the presence of clearly identifiable trans-paradigmatic transformations in design, colour, and composition. Accordingly, only carpets produced during the final decades of the fourteenth century SH and represented within the two selected collections were included in the analysis.

The inclusion of these two collections was not intended to facilitate a comparative analysis between them. Rather, they were selected solely to delimit the scope of the study. Consequently, all selected carpets were analysed as a single, coherent body of evidence.

This study is fundamental in purpose and qualitative in approach. Data were collected through documentary research and fieldwork, including direct observation and the systematic examination of selected carpets, and were analysed using a descriptive-analytical method. The overall research design and analytical framework are presented in Fig. 1.

Literature Review

Research on Iranian carpets has long been dominated by recurring interpretative frameworks, resulting in the relative neglect of contemporary developments in Iranian carpet production. Consequently, significant gaps remain in the existing scholarship. As the present study adopts

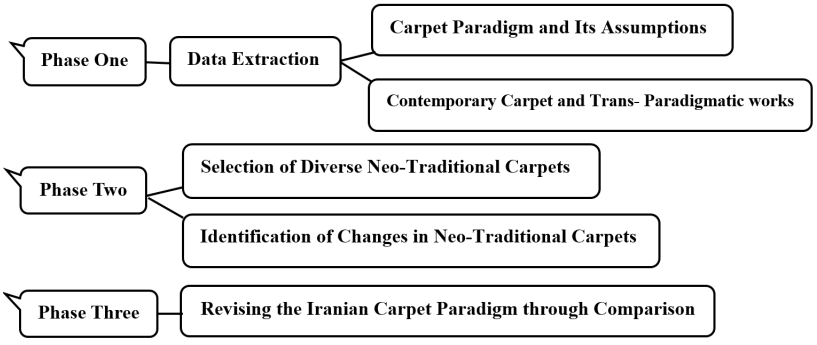


Fig. 1. Overall research design and analytical framework. Source: Authors.

a new theoretical perspective, no previous research has examined this subject from the standpoint advanced here. This absence of directly comparable studies has made the research particularly challenging. Nevertheless, a number of conceptually relevant studies have informed the present investigation. These are reviewed under two broad categories.

- **The concept of paradigm**

The term Iranian Carpet Paradigm, introduced in the present study to denote the conceptual framework and disciplinary structure governing the field of Iranian carpets, is proposed here for the first time. Nevertheless, several influential studies have examined the broader concept of paradigm or have employed the notion of a carpet paradigm from perspectives fundamentally different from that adopted in this research.

Among the most influential works is Thomas S. Kuhn's (1970) "The structure of scientific revolutions", which explores the nature of paradigms, the mechanisms through which they evolve, and the processes that give rise to paradigm shifts. Kuhn's theoretical framework constitutes one of the principal conceptual foundations of the present study.

Particular attention should also be given to Joseph Masheck's (1976) article "The carpet paradigm: Critical prolegomena to a theory of flatness". Masheck was the first scholar to employ the term carpet paradigm. However, he used it to describe a recurring visual strategy in the work of modern artists, a concept that differs fundamentally from the Iranian Carpet Paradigm developed in the present research. Subsequent studies that revisited the notion of the carpet paradigm likewise remained within the theoretical framework established by Masheck.

Among these contributions, Sundberg & Rosenqvist (2014), in their article "Editorial Reconsidering the Carpet Paradigm", argue that the carpet, both as a material object and as a subject of scholarly inquiry, offers valuable opportunities for advancing the study of art and art history. They contend that its inherently interdisciplinary character enables productive dialogue across diverse artistic disciplines.

- **Transformations in Iranian carpets**

Although no previous study has examined neo-traditional carpets in Iran directly, a limited body of scholarship has investigated transformations in Iranian carpets from a variety of perspectives.

For example, in "Traditionalism and Departure from Tradition in Carpet Design", Habibollah Ayatollahi (2006) argues that contemporary Iranian carpet design has become increasingly characterised by imitation and repetition, resulting in a static mode of production with limited capacity for innovation. He further contends that this stagnant form of traditionalism has distanced the Iranian carpet from the domain of artistic creativity.

Similarly, in "Pathology of current carpet designs and some recommendations for innovation to improve them", Mohammad Hossein Rahmati (2008) characterises the preceding three to four decades as a period marked by decline and structural shortcomings in Iranian carpet production. While critically evaluating a complete departure from the traditional framework of carpet design, he proposes approaches to innovation that remain grounded in Iranian cultural traditions.

Pourmand et al. (2011), in "Role of new design to expansion and development of hand-woven carpet", identify market demand and changing consumer preferences as the principal forces driving the emergence of new categories of carpets, including three-dimensional, embossed, and pictorial carpets. They argue that the long-term sustainability of handwoven carpet production depends on its capacity to respond to these evolving market demands.

In "A sociological explanation of the evolution or the stability in Iran's contemporary carpet designing system", Mirzaei et al. (2016) examine the social factors underlying continuity and transformation in the carpet design traditions of Isfahan and Tabriz. Their findings indicate that, while the Isfahan tradition has remained largely committed to conventional principles of design and colour, the Tabriz tradition has increasingly moved beyond these established criteria.

Likewise, in "Historical study of the confrontation between tradition and modernity in the design and color of the Iranian handmade carpet", Zamiri & Afshar Mohajer (2019) investigate the nature and extent of transformations in the design and colour of urban carpets

produced in Isfahan, Tabriz, Kerman, and Mashhad from the Qajar period onward, identifying the regions that have undergone the most substantial changes.

Finally, in "Variation instance in visual component of Tabriz contemporary carpets", Mirzaei (2020) analyses the transformations that have taken place in the visual characteristics of Tabriz carpets over the past two decades.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that transformations in Iranian carpets have generally been examined within the conceptual boundaries of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm and in relation to established regional weaving traditions. By contrast, neo-traditional carpets are introduced and examined for the first time in the present study as a distinct category of contemporary Iranian carpets. Furthermore, their formal and conceptual transformations are analysed in relation to authentic carpets, whose defining characteristics are grounded in the principles of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. This perspective makes it possible to identify the conceptual limitations of the dominant paradigm and to reassess its explanatory capacity in the contemporary era.

The originality of the present study therefore lies not only in introducing and analysing neo-traditional carpets as a previously unexamined category, but also in offering a critical re-evaluation of the assumptions, boundaries, and explanatory framework of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm.

Stage One: Establishing the Theoretical Framework and Data Extraction

As outlined in the research methodology, data extraction was conducted in two stages. The first stage focused on conceptualising the Iranian Carpet Paradigm and identifying the assumptions that constitute its theoretical foundation.

The Iranian Carpet Paradigm, introduced in the present study as the conceptual and practical framework governing the field of Iranian carpets, is a multidimensional construct whose analysis requires a clear understanding of the concept of paradigm itself. According to Thomas S. Kuhn, a paradigm:

1. is founded upon achievements that have gained broad acceptance within a scholarly community;
2. establishes a particular tradition in the interpretation of phenomena and in the application of methods, tools, and techniques; and
3. constitutes a network of theoretical, methodological, and instrumental commitments.

As Kuhn (1970, 222) observes, "Paradigms, insofar as they denote the shared commitments of a scientific community, constitute the framework of a specialised field".

Harold Pearse (1992, 244) likewise argues that, in its broadest sense, a paradigm represents a worldview or a coherent intellectual orientation that informs and shapes human action In another work, he (Pearse, 1983, 158) further maintains that "Paradigms indicate the ways in which knowledge or behaviour is organised".

Neither Kuhn nor Pearse, however, regards paradigms as static or immutable structures. Kuhn conceptualises paradigms as dynamic intellectual frameworks characterised by an ongoing tension between conservative and transformative orientations. From this perspective, the interaction between forces that seek to preserve established traditions and those that challenge them constitutes the primary mechanism through which paradigms evolve and undergo transformation.

Accordingly, both convergent and divergent modes of thought are essential to the advancement of knowledge, as each plays a complementary role in the formation, continuity, and transformation of paradigms.

Accordingly, "the principal motivation behind the emergence of a new paradigm is to enable the next generation to think within a new paradigmatic framework" (Fuller, 2003, 38). Such transformation, however, can occur only through an understanding of the changing conditions of contemporary society, whose cultural and intellectual landscape is continually reshaped by evolving needs, expectations, and aesthetic preferences.

From this perspective, the Iranian Carpet Paradigm has established a normative framework that has profoundly influenced the scholarly understanding and evaluation of Iranian carpets. Over time, the assumptions and standards embedded within this paradigm have become so deeply

institutionalised that works departing from its established criteria have frequently been marginalised as inconsistent with, or even as deviations from the accepted conception of authenticity. With particular reference to design and colour, the principal assumptions underpinning the Iranian Carpet Paradigm may be summarised as follows.

a) Traditional Character: The Iranian carpet has long been understood as a form of traditional art. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2004, 209) argues that "traditional art is entirely rooted in and dependent upon tradition, both in the ideas it expresses and in the means and methods through which those ideas are conveyed". Traditional art, moreover, refers to realities that transcend the artwork itself and is therefore inherently symbolic. As Frithjof Schuon (1981, 191) observes, "In traditional art there must be neither perspective, nor shadow, nor movement". Traditional Iranian design, of which carpet design constitutes an integral subcategory, is characterized by distinctive features that embody the authenticity and cultural identity of Iranian art. It stands in contrast to non-traditional forms of design (Mirzaei, 2020, 38). In this regard, Hassouri (Hassouri, 2006, 7) argues that "in traditional design, the foundations, which encompass ideas and rituals, are entirely traditional; that is, they draw upon specific historical and ancient rules and principles that are regarded as constitutive elements of tradition."

b) Pattern-Based Classification: Following the classifications proposed by early carpet scholars, the Iran Carpet Company organised Iranian carpet designs into nineteen principal groups together with a number of subgroups, including Ancient Monuments and Islamic Architecture, Shah Abbasi, Arabesque (*Eslimi*), Adapted Designs, *Afshan*, Repeated-Module (*Vagireh/Bandi*), Boteh, Tree, Turkmen, Hunting Ground, Gol-e Farang, Panel (*Kheshti*), Vase, Herati (*Mahi dar Ham*), *Mihrab*, Moharramat, Geometric, Tribal and Nomadic, and Composite Designs (Zhuleh, 2002, 20–23).

This classification has long served as one of the principal frameworks for evaluating Iranian carpets. Nevertheless, many contemporary carpets display formal and compositional characteristics that extend beyond these established categories. Moreover, even the category of Composite Designs is no longer sufficiently comprehensive to accommodate many recent developments.

c) Emphasis on Authenticity: Authenticity has traditionally been regarded as one of the defining principles of traditional art. Rather than being associated with individual creativity or a particular historical period, it is understood as a stable and enduring quality rooted in the continuity of tradition. The authenticity of a traditional work therefore depends on its faithful adherence to established principles rather than on originality or innovation. Within the Iranian Carpet Paradigm, authenticity has consequently become associated with the production of carpets that preserve and reproduce distinguished historical models. Meticulous adherence to inherited principles of design and established artistic conventions has thus long been regarded as the primary means of safeguarding the authenticity of Iranian carpets.

d) Collective Artistic Conventions: Traditional arts are governed by collective artistic conventions that emerge through shared cultural experience and regional traditions rather than through individual artistic expression. In this regard, Arthur Upham Pope & Ackerman (1983/2008, 2609) maintains that "the carpet possesses an inherent collective identity". Accordingly, an authentic carpet is understood as one that conforms to collectively established artistic conventions, the aesthetic principles of carpet design, the indigenous characteristics of its weaving tradition, and its historical heritage.

e) Rootedness in Local Traditions: As a traditional art form, the Iranian carpet has historically been inseparable from local and regional traditions. As Quinn argues, "localism is the outcome of the interaction of diverse social, cultural, environmental, and historical factors within traditional art" (Quinn, 1997/2015, 256). Consequently, regional identity has long been regarded as an intrinsic and defining characteristic of the Iranian carpet, shaping both its formal qualities and its cultural significance.

Theoretical Framework of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the structural composition, colour palette, spatial organisation, and motifs of the Iranian carpet embody the aesthetic principles

articulated within the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. As Howard S. Becker observes, "Aesthetic principles, arguments, and judgments constitute an important part of the conventions that make the collective activity of members of an art world possible" (Becker, 2012/2020, 158). These principles likewise provide the theoretical foundation upon which collectors, scholars, and connoisseurs evaluate and select carpets (ibid, 160). Fig. 2 summarises the principal assumptions and normative standards of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm, with particular reference to carpet design and colour.

The second stage of the theoretical discussion examines the concepts of the contemporary carpet and trans-paradigmatic works. Before doing so, however, it is essential to clarify the conceptual relationship among tradition, authenticity, neo-traditionalism, and contemporaneity.

The aesthetic system of the Iranian carpet constitutes one of the fundamental components of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm, while authenticity represents one of its central organising principles. Consequently, the paradigm has historically provided the principal criteria for distinguishing authentic from non-authentic carpets. Within this framework, an authentic carpet is understood as one that faithfully embodies both the indigenous characteristics of its weaving tradition and its historical identity. Authenticity therefore derives from a carpet's capacity to preserve and express tradition, establishing an intrinsic relationship between the concepts of tradition and authenticity.

In this regard, Nasr argues that the most important factor in the discussion of tradition is its continuity, which always entails transmission (Nasr, 1981/2004, 209). This perspective suggests that the traditions of the carpet have been repeatedly transmitted and maintained alongside the civilization from which they originated. Tradition, therefore, contributes to the continuity and persistence of the characteristics through which authenticity is recognized within the Carpet Paradigm, thereby reinforcing the relationship between tradition and authenticity.

The traditional carpet designer developed within a cultural environment in which artistic practice was fundamentally shaped by inherited traditions and local cultural values. Consequently, creative practice was directed primarily towards preserving and expressing the aesthetic and cultural principles of that tradition. By contrast, the contemporary carpet designer operates within a markedly different social, cultural, and economic context. Shaped by the conditions of contemporary society, creative practice is increasingly guided by specific objectives particularly the need to respond to changing consumer expectations and market demands rather than solely by the imperative to sustain inherited traditions.

Whereas traditional carpet designers sought to preserve, reproduce, and reinforce established cultural values, contemporary designers increasingly employ strategies of reinterpretation, selection, recombination, and creative reconfiguration. As a consequence, the contemporary era has witnessed a fundamental rethinking of both tradition and authenticity. Within this context, the transformations observed in neo-traditional carpets should be understood as developments that emerge through the reinterpretation and creative reconstruction of the Iranian carpet tradition rather than through its rejection. Although these processes of reinterpretation have, in some instances, challenged long-established conventions, they have not resulted in a complete rupture with tradition. The neo-traditional

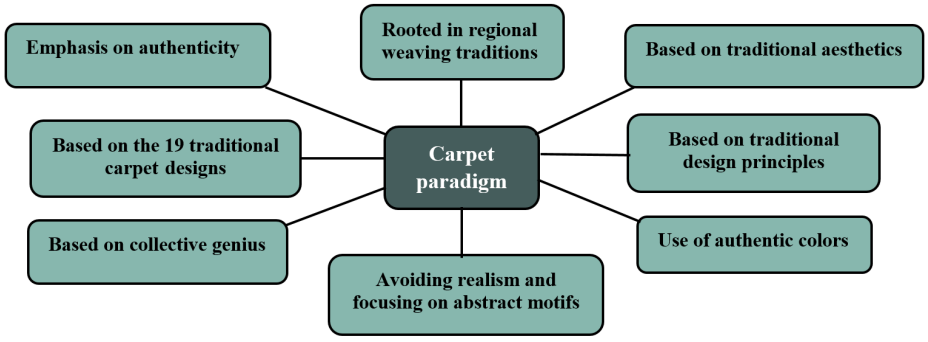


Fig. 2. Structure of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm in Design and Color. Source: Authors.

carpet should therefore be understood neither as a simple continuation of tradition nor as its negation. Rather, as Iranian carpet production has become increasingly shaped by cultural exchange and contemporary social conditions, it has evolved into a medium through which tradition and contemporaneity engage in an ongoing dialogue.

The theoretical framework developed in this study demonstrates that the principal assumptions underpinning the Iranian Carpet Paradigm, its traditional character, pattern-based classification, emphasis on authenticity, collective artistic conventions, and rootedness in local traditions are themselves undergoing significant transformation. Consequently, the relationship between the contemporary carpet and tradition has been fundamentally reconfigured. The distinction between traditional and contemporary Iranian carpets, therefore, cannot be explained solely in terms of differences in visual characteristics or methods of production. Rather, it reflects two distinct conceptual frameworks through which Iranian carpets are interpreted, defined, and represented.

- **Social transformations and their impact on the Iranian carpet**

The transformations that occurred during the fourteenth century SH (Solar Hijri) marked a decisive turning point in the history of the Iranian carpet. As new social realities, cultural values, and intellectual discourses emerged, the established order of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm was progressively reconfigured, giving rise to new forms of visual expression that distinguished contemporary carpets from those of earlier periods. Understanding contemporary Iranian carpets therefore requires an understanding of contemporaneity itself and the historical conditions through which this new cultural landscape has been shaped. As. Kuhn (1970, 120) argues, any body of knowledge can be understood only in relation to the characteristics of the community that produces and employs it.

One of the most important discourses in the contemporary era has been the discourse of modernity, which itself generated and contributed to the emergence of other discourses, including those of innovation and consumerism. In its broadest and general sense, modernity is associated with ideas of innovation, invention, initiative, novelty, creativity, pioneering, progress, development, growth, evolution, taste, and fashion (Osborne, 1996/2000, 65).

Within this broader context, rapid urbanisation, the expansion of capitalist economies, the integration of global markets, and the rise of consumer culture accelerated the transformation of Iranian carpet production. As changing lifestyles generated new functional requirements and aesthetic expectations, increasing demand for novel products reshaped both the direction and the logic of carpet production. Consequently, a wide range of innovative, and at times convention-defying, carpets entered the market in response to the diverse preferences of contemporary consumers. Innovation thus became not merely an artistic strategy but also a cultural and economic response to the changing conditions of contemporary society, facilitating the emergence of a new generation of carpets collectively identified as contemporary carpets.

These developments transformed not only the methods and creative orientations of carpet designers but also challenged the conceptual assumptions underpinning the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. As a result, a dualistic framework emerged in which carpets came to be increasingly classified as either authentic or non-authentic, and as traditional or modern. This binary mode of interpretation, in turn, gave rise to a broader theoretical debate concerning the identity, boundaries, and future of the Iranian carpet.

In this regard, Zhuleh (2013, 12) argues that "the absence of new theoretical frameworks and the failure to re-examine established perceptions, analyses, and assumptions in the contemporary period are among the main causes of the stagnation, exhaustion, and even backwardness of carpet studies in Iran". His observation suggests that although carpets produced within established traditions have continued to appeal to a particular audience, the changing realities of contemporary society have made transformation within Iranian carpet production both necessary and inevitable.

Under these conditions, no society can remain entirely insulated from the integrative forces of an increasingly interconnected world. As Christopher Pierson (1998/2001, 38) observes,

"Whereas we once lived in a world of tradition, today we live in a world of traditions". Similarly, Afshar Mohajer (2012, 5) argues that "in the global village, we cannot remain confined behind the bars of supposedly immutable traditions, merely observing our own limited sphere and taking pride only in the achievements of the past".

As discussed earlier, the Iranian Carpet Paradigm historically directed scholarly attention towards a relatively limited range of accepted works, thereby restricting the recognition of carpets that extended beyond its conceptual boundaries. In the contemporary era, however, carpet designers increasingly sought to transcend these limitations without abandoning the cultural foundations of Iranian carpet weaving. One of the most significant outcomes of this process was the emergence of carpets that neither simply preserved inherited traditions nor rejected them outright, but instead reinterpreted them within a contemporary cultural framework. It is this category of works that the present study identifies as neo-traditional carpets. Among the diverse forms of contemporary Iranian carpets, these works have gained particularly widespread recognition, and their production has expanded steadily over recent decades.

It should also be recognised that the Iranian carpet has always maintained a close relationship with the lived experiences of its users. Consequently, transformations in everyday life inevitably reshape both the form and the function of the carpet. The remarkable diversity of carpets currently available in the market clearly reflects this broader cultural transformation. Such diversity has emerged in response to increasingly differentiated tastes, expectations, and worldviews across successive generations, each historical period giving rise to its own distinctive social and aesthetic demands.

As Heinich (2001/2005, 116) observes, "works regarded as subordinate within one system of evaluation may occupy a dominant position within another". Likewise, Daryaei (2007, 9) argues that "an artist creates a work to satisfy the needs and purposes of the audience of his or her own time. Consequently, the artist inevitably draws upon the political, cultural, social, moral, and ethnic ideas of that society. This is not merely because these constitute the artist's own knowledge, but because they also represent the knowledge, values, and expectations of the artist's contemporaries, the very audience for whom the work is created".

• Revisiting the Iranian carpet paradigm in light of Contemporary Iranian carpets

The term contemporary Iranian carpets, which gained currency during the contemporary period, is itself conceptually contested. Although it generally refers to carpets produced during the fourteenth century SH (Solar Hijri), the term does not clarify whether these works continue to conform to the established conventions of authentic Iranian carpets or represent a departure from them. Consequently, its widespread use obscures important conceptual distinctions and necessitates a more precise definition of what constitutes a contemporary Iranian carpet. The first step in this discussion, therefore, is to establish the criteria by which such works may be identified.

As argued in the preceding sections, contemporary Iranian carpets cannot be adequately understood without reference to the broader transformations of the contemporary world. Roland Robertson argues that "Particular cultures and the individuals who live within them can no longer explain their values, beliefs, and ways of life solely through local traditions, indigenous systems of belief, or localised worldviews; rather, they are compelled either to adapt to contemporary conditions or to position themselves in relation to them" (Waters, 2001, 229). This observation underscores the importance of understanding contemporaneity not merely as a chronological designation but as a distinct cultural and intellectual condition.

Giorgio Agamben (2008/2022, 74) likewise argues that "Contemporaneity requires not only a structure but also a contemporary language". Similarly, Sami Azar (2009, 12) maintains that "To be contemporary in art signifies both a historical passage and a form of theoretical and medial reorientation".

Building upon these perspectives, the present study employs the term contemporary Iranian carpets not simply to denote carpets produced during the contemporary period, but specifically to refer to works that embody a discernible process of transformation. Such carpets

depart, to varying degrees, from the established criteria of authentic Iranian carpets and represent a historical transition beyond the conceptual boundaries of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. Consequently, carpets produced during the contemporary period that continue to conform to the paradigm's established conception of authenticity are not regarded in this study as contemporary Iranian carpets in the theoretical sense intended here.

Within this conceptual framework, the transformations observed in contemporary Iranian carpets are classified into two principal categories:

(a) Transformations through the reinterpretation of tradition, which emerge from the reinterpretation, re-reading, and creative reconstruction of the Iranian carpet tradition in response to contemporary cultural, social, and aesthetic conditions.

(b) Transformations departing from tradition, which move beyond the established conventions of Iranian carpet design and explore new formal structures, visual languages, and aesthetic possibilities.

Stage Two: Neo-Traditional Carpets and the Identification of Their Transformative Characteristics

In recent decades, Iranian carpet designers have pursued diverse approaches to renewing the tradition of Iranian carpet production. Contemporary Iranian carpets encompass a wide range of categories; among these, the present study introduces the term neo-traditional carpets for the first time to designate a distinct category of works whose designs and colour palettes emerge through the reinterpretation of the Iranian carpet tradition without severing their relationship with it. This designation is therefore based primarily on their visual and formal characteristics and distinguishes them from conventionally recognised traditional carpets.

To clarify the distinction between Neo-Traditionalism as an artistic movement and neo-traditional carpets, an important theoretical point should be emphasised. As Keshmirshekan observes, artists associated with the Saqqakhaneh movement "drew extensively on the rituals, customs, and visual elements of Iranian folk and indigenous culture" (Keshmirshekan, 2014, 119). Carpets themselves, however, have historically constituted an integral part of these rituals, customs, and the visual culture of Iranian society. Consequently, neo-traditionalism in carpet design differs fundamentally from Neo-Traditionalism in other artistic disciplines. Within the context of Iranian carpets, neo-traditionalism does not simply entail a return to indigenous sources; rather, it denotes a renewed engagement with the historical heritage of Iranian carpets while simultaneously moving beyond the collective artistic conventions that have traditionally governed carpet design and weaving.

Accordingly, designers of neo-traditional carpets have not sought merely to rediscover or reproduce indigenous motifs, since these have always formed an inseparable part of the Iranian carpet tradition. Instead, their objective has been to reinterpret, recombine, and transform inherited visual resources into new aesthetic configurations. Although these new syntheses continue to maintain strong cultural references to the historical geography of Iran, designers have developed individual visual languages that preserve the Iranian identity of the carpet while simultaneously incorporating non-indigenous visual traditions and, in some instances, introducing entirely new motifs, compositional strategies, and design vocabularies.

Within this category of carpets, innovation and creativity have emerged largely in response to the discourse of consumerism and the changing demands of contemporary society. Although neo-traditional carpets depart from many of the established conventions governing traditional carpet design and colour, they continue to retain extensive historical references. At the same time, they clearly transcend the conceptual framework of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. They may therefore be understood as simultaneously historical and dehistoricised: they draw upon motifs originating from different historical periods while dissolving their original temporal and geographical boundaries through the fusion of styles, the recombination of visual traditions, and the creation of entirely new formal compositions.

These carpets incorporate an extensive repertoire of historical motifs; however, they do not necessarily preserve the symbolic meanings or cultural contexts in which those motifs originally emerged. Fig. 3 illustrates

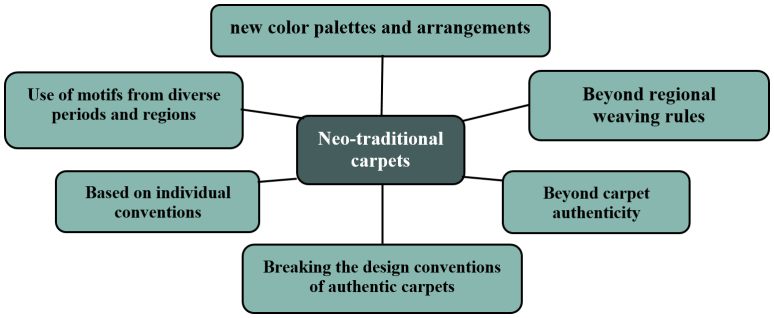


Fig. 3. Meta-paradigmatic principles and conventions in neo-traditionalist carpets. Source: Authors.

the principal characteristics of neo-traditional carpets that diverge from the normative assumptions of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm.

Within traditional society, carpet production operated according to a relatively stable system of aesthetic values, and designers created works within the framework of regional traditions, inherited design repertoires, and collective cultural memory. In the contemporary era, however, this relationship has undergone a fundamental transformation. The changes observed in contemporary carpets should therefore be understood as manifestations of broader transformations in contemporary society rather than merely as formal innovations.

From this perspective, neo-traditionalism in Iranian carpet design should not be interpreted as a rejection of tradition. Rather, it represents a fundamental transformation in the way tradition is understood and employed. Tradition no longer functions as an obligatory model to be faithfully reproduced; instead, it has become a dynamic source of reinterpretation, selection, recombination, and creative production. Consequently, neo-traditionalism should be understood not simply as a change in visual appearance but as a profound reconfiguration of the relationship between tradition, authenticity, and the process of design itself.

Under these conditions, the value of a neo-traditional carpet can no longer be assessed solely according to the degree of its fidelity to inherited traditions. Instead, one of its principal criteria of evaluation lies in its capacity to establish a meaningful dialogue between historical heritage and the cultural, aesthetic, and functional needs of contemporary society. Accordingly, the present study analyses neo-traditional carpets through the dynamic interaction between tradition and innovation. From this perspective, tradition is understood not as a fixed repertoire of forms but as a living system of visual and cultural relationships that is continuously reinterpreted and reconstructed.

The emergence of neo-traditionalism in contemporary Iranian carpet design has therefore displaced carpet production from the collective conventions that historically governed the practice of carpet weaving and has manifested itself through a wide range of formal strategies. Based on the transformations identified in the research sample, these developments are classified into six principal categories:

a) The introduction of new visual elements into carpet design (Table 1)

b) Transformations in colour palettes and chromatic organisation (Table 2)

c) The reconfiguration of the existing repertoire of carpet motifs through new compositional relationships (Table 3)

d) The incorporation and synthesis of other visual traditions, both Iranian and non-Iranian (Table 4)

e) Transformations of conventional carpet patterns (Table 5)

f) The creation of fractal[3] visual structures and effects (Table 6)

As the preceding figures and tables demonstrate, the transformations identified in neo-traditional carpets extend across multiple formal, conceptual, and aesthetic dimensions. Although these extra-paradigmatic works continue to engage with the historical tradition of Iranian carpet weaving, they differ fundamentally from carpets produced within the normative framework of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. Table 7 summarises the principal transformations identified in the research sample and illustrates the various forms through which they are manifested.

Table 1. Neo-traditional carpets incorporating new visual elements. Source: Authors.

Collection Title	Deljavan Collection	Deljavan Collection	Azimzadeh Collection
The image of the carpet			
Source	www.ariadeljavan.com	www.ariadeljavan.com	www.azimzadeh.ir
New Visual Elements	Image of a Curtain and Moon	Image of the Moon, a Peacock, and Peacock Feathers	Image of a Deformed Mihrab

Table 2. Neo-traditional carpets incorporating transformations in colour palettes and chromatic organisation. Source: Authors.

Collection Title	Deljavan Collection	Azimzadeh Collection	Azimzadeh Collection
The image of the carpet			
Source	www.ariadeljavan.com	www.azimzadeh.ir	www.azimzadeh.ir
New Visual Elements	Magenta and Pink as the Dominant Colors	Breaking the Classical Color Composition	Breaking the Classical Color Composition

Stage Three: Data Analysis

Art is inherently dynamic. Its forms, meanings, and modes of expression evolve in response to changing historical, cultural, and social conditions, continually generating new questions and new interpretative frameworks. The Iranian Carpet Paradigm, which for decades privileged certain categories of carpets while marginalising others, has itself been reshaped by contemporary social, cultural, and economic transformations. These developments have created the conditions for a critical reappraisal of the paradigm's explanatory capacity. As Thomas S. Kuhn (1970, 257) argues, the emergence of new knowledge requires the re-evaluation and reorganisation of existing conceptual structures.

Although many carpet scholars continue to maintain that "the highest and most elevated carpets are those that derive from the untouched traditions of this craft" (Pope & Ackerman, 1938/2008, 2612), concepts such as authenticity, aesthetic value, and the distinction between authentic and inauthentic carpets should not be regarded as intrinsic qualities of the carpets themselves. Rather, they are historically and culturally constructed concepts that derive their meaning from specific intellectual and disciplinary contexts. Contemporary society is no longer

Table 3. Neo-traditional carpets reconfiguring the existing repertoire of carpet motifs through new compositional relationships. Source: Authors.

Collection Title	Deljavan Collection	Azimzadeh Collection	Deljavan Collection
The image of the carpet			
Source	www.ariadeljavan.com	www.azimzadeh.ir	www.ariadeljavan.com
New Visual Elements	New Composition	New Composition	New Composition

Table 4. Neo-traditional carpets incorporating Iranian and non-Iranian visual traditions. Source: Authors.

Collection Title	Deljavan Collection	Deljavan Collection	Deljavan Collection
The image of the carpet			
Source	www.ariadeljavan.com	www.ariadeljavan.com	www.ariadeljavan.com
New Visual Elements	Combination of Traditional Persian and Western Decorative Elements	Western Decorative Elements	Persian Decorative Elements (Tiled Pool and Fish)

defined by a singular worldview grounded exclusively in inherited traditions and symbolic systems. Instead, contemporary identities have become increasingly plural, fragmented, and shaped by multiple cultural influences. Consequently, many recent developments in Iranian carpet design cannot be adequately interpreted through the conventional conceptual framework of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm.

At the same time, contemporary conditions have expanded the possibilities for individual artistic agency and for moving beyond inherited collective conventions. Under such circumstances, insisting upon the uncritical repetition of traditional artistic principles inevitably overlooks the profound transformations that have reshaped both artistic production and its social reception. This demonstrates that our understanding of Iranian carpets is neither objective nor immutable. Rather, it is mediated by the conceptual frameworks through which carpets are interpreted. Because these frameworks are themselves historical and social constructions, they remain open to critical revision and theoretical reconstruction.

Viewed from this perspective, a critical re-examination of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm through the analytical lens of neo-traditional carpets leads to the following conclusions.

1. The Iranian Carpet Paradigm constitutes a historically and socially constructed framework whose explanatory

capacity is necessarily limited. Although preserving the authenticity of Iranian carpets remains an important concern, interpreting contemporary carpet production also requires attention to changing social needs, emerging cultural values, and ongoing processes of transformation. Such an approach makes it possible to recognise and evaluate carpets that fall beyond conventional definitions of authenticity and aesthetic value. This issue has become increasingly significant as the diversification of contemporary audiences has accelerated changes in Iranian carpet production. The findings indicate that these transformations cannot be understood independently of broader social change; rather, they have emerged through the interaction between evolving social conditions and the inherited conceptual structure of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm. The cumulative outcome has been a gradual displacement of the paradigm's traditional explanatory boundaries. (Table 8) summarises the principal distinctions between traditional and neo-traditional carpets.

2. The emergence of neo-traditional carpets should not be interpreted as the consequence of an internal transformation of tradition itself. Rather, it has resulted from the interaction of broader social and cultural

Table 5. Neo-traditional carpets transforming conventional carpet patterns. Source: Authors.

Collection Title	Azimzadeh Collection	Deljavan Collection	Deljavan Collection
The image of the carpet			
Source	www.azimzadeh.ir	www.ariadeljavan.com	www.ariadeljavan.com
New Visual Elements	Transformation of the Vase Design	Transformation of the Medallion Design	Transformation of the Mihrab Design

Table 6. Neo-traditional carpets creating fractal visual structures and effects. Source: Authors.

Collection Title	Azimzadeh Collection	Azimzadeh Collection	Azimzadeh Collection
The image of the carpet			
Source	www.azimzadeh.ir	www.azimzadeh.ir	www.azimzadeh.ir
New Visual Elements	Fractal Watercolor Elements	Fractal Botanical Elements	Integration of Traditional Design and Fractal Elements

Rest of Table 6.

Collection Title	Deljavan Collection	Azimzadeh Collection	Deljavan Collection
The image of the carpet			
Source	www.ariadeljavan.com	www.azimzadeh.ir	www.ariadeljavan.com
New Visual Elements	Combination of Traditional Motifs and Fractal Light Elements	Fractal Light Effects	Fractal Light Effects

Table 7. Changes in neo-traditional carpets and their manifestations in the research statistical population. Source: Authors.

Category of Transformation	Manifestation of Transformation in Neo-traditional Carpets
Introduction of New Visual Elements	- Distorted ornamental elements - Creation of new visual elements
Transformations in Colour Palettes and Chromatic Organisation	- Changes in chromatic organisation - Use of unconventional colours - Expanded colour diversity and richness - Restriction of the carpet colour palette to two or three colours
Reconfiguration of Existing Carpet Motifs through New Compositional Relationships	- Formation of new compositional arrangements - Repositioning authentic carpet motifs within new systems of visual relationships - Deliberate disruption of established design proportions - Disruption of the conventional border system through the reduction, simplification, or elimination of borders
Incorporation and Synthesis of Other Visual Traditions	- Synthesis of carpet designs and motifs from different regional weaving traditions - Synthesis of carpet motifs with motifs derived from other visual media - Incorporation of Western ornamental elements
Transformations of Conventional Carpet Patterns	- Transformation of established Iranian carpet patterns while preserving their underlying structural and thematic identity
Creation of Fractal Visual Structures	- Watercolour-like fractal effects - Luminous fractal effects - Regular fractal structures - Composite (overlapping) fractal structures

Table 8. Differences between the conventions and normative standards governing traditional carpets and neo-traditional carpets. Source: Authors.

Neo-traditional Carpets	Traditional Carpets
Emphasis on intertextual relationships, synthesis, and recombination	Emphasis on authenticity
Grounded in the dynamic relationship between tradition and contemporaneity	Grounded in the relationship between authenticity and tradition
Based on deconstruction and innovation	Adherence to established principles and conventions
Emphasis on individual creativity	Emphasis on collective artistic conventions
Deterritorialisation from regional weaving traditions	Adherence to the established conventions of regional weaving traditions
Pattern-transgressive and open to transformation	Pattern-based and resistant to fundamental change
Creative manipulation of composition and proportional relationships	Organisation based on geometric order, symmetry, rhythm, proportion, and balance
Inclination towards naturalistic and realist imagery	Use of abstract motifs without depth or perspective
Diverse colour palettes and tonal gradation	Use of clearly defined colours and avoidance of tonal shading

transformations, changing market demands, and the increasing creative autonomy of designers and producers.

3. Neo-traditional carpets embody a dynamic dialogue between tradition and contemporaneity. Within this dialogue, tradition no longer functions as a fixed and immutable system of rules. Instead, it operates as a repository of visual forms, aesthetic structures, and cultural memory that is continually reinterpreted, recombined, and creatively reconstructed in response to changing historical conditions.

4. The most significant transformations observed in neo-traditional carpets occur not merely in their motifs or colour palettes but in the underlying principles governing the organisation of visual elements. Colour increasingly moves beyond the symbolic and aesthetic conventions established by the Iranian Carpet Paradigm and becomes a means of responding to the functional, cultural, and aesthetic requirements of contemporary living environments. Likewise, transformations in motifs and compositional structures indicate a shift from a rule-governed system of production towards one increasingly shaped by the creative agency of designers and the expectations of contemporary consumers. Fundamentally, what has changed is the relationship among designers, audiences, and tradition itself.

5. Although the introduction of new visual elements, transformations in colour palettes and chromatic organisation, the reconfiguration of inherited visual repertoires, the incorporation of Iranian and non-Iranian visual traditions, the transformation of conventional carpet patterns, and the creation of fractal visual structures all constitute visible manifestations of change, the significance of neo-traditional carpets extends far beyond their formal appearance. More fundamentally, these works redefine the relationship between tradition, authenticity, and the process of design, thereby challenging the explanatory boundaries of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm itself.

Conclusion

During the second half of the fourteenth century SH (Solar Hijri), many Iranian carpet designers continued to work within the established framework of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm, considering its aesthetic principles and conceptual boundaries sufficient for contemporary carpet production. At the same time, however, another group of designers adopted alternative approaches and introduced new criteria for evaluating the aesthetic qualities of carpets. Emerging in response to the changing social, cultural, and economic conditions of the contemporary era, these developments exposed the conceptual limitations of the classical Iranian Carpet Paradigm and prompted the emergence of new modes of carpet production and interpretation.

Consistent with the objectives of this study to examine the trans-paradigmatic transformations of neo-traditional carpets during the second half of the fourteenth century SH and to investigate the factors underlying their departure from the conceptual framework of the Iranian Carpet Paradigm, the findings demonstrate that contemporary Iranian carpet production has progressively extended beyond the explanatory boundaries of its dominant paradigm. This shift should not be understood as the result of an internal transformation of tradition itself. Rather, it has been driven by broader social and cultural developments, including modernity, globalisation, changing lifestyles, the expansion of consumer markets, and the growing influence of new technologies. Within this context, the cultural, symbolic, and ritual functions historically associated with the Iranian carpet have increasingly intersected with the logics of consumer culture, contemporary aesthetics, and market demand. Among the diverse categories of contemporary carpets, neo-traditional carpets provide one of the clearest manifestations of this transition, revealing dimensions of Iranian carpet production that have remained largely unaddressed in previous scholarship.

The transformations identified in the design, colour, and visual organisation of neo-traditional carpets further demonstrate that the most significant changes have occurred not merely at the level of formal appearance but in the underlying logic of design itself. Consequently, the relationship between the designer and tradition has been fundamentally reconfigured. Tradition is no longer approached as a fixed body of obligatory rules governing the reproduction of inherited forms; instead, it functions as a dynamic cultural resource that enables reinterpretation,

recombination, and creative reconstruction. Accordingly, although neo-traditional carpets constitute trans-paradigmatic works, their departure from the classical paradigm should not be interpreted as a rejection of tradition. Rather, it represents an effort to sustain the continuity of the Iranian carpet tradition through a visual language capable of responding to the cultural, social, and aesthetic conditions of the contemporary world. From this perspective, neo-traditionalism may be understood as a process through which tradition and authenticity are continually renegotiated through creative continuity rather than historical replication. The Iranian carpet has therefore evolved from a relatively stable cultural form sustained primarily through the reproduction of inherited conventions into a dynamic cultural practice grounded in the continuous reinterpretation of its own tradition.

More broadly, the findings indicate that the emergence of neo-traditional carpets reflects not only a transformation in carpet design but also a broader reconfiguration of the conceptual relationship between tradition, authenticity, and contemporaneity. The evidence suggests that the Iranian Carpet Paradigm, while remaining indispensable for understanding the historical foundations of Iranian carpet production, can no longer fully account for the diversity and complexity of contemporary developments. Re-examining its assumptions therefore provides a more comprehensive framework for interpreting contemporary Iranian carpets and opens new directions for future research into the evolving relationship between cultural heritage, artistic creativity, and social change.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Endnotes

1. The Arya Deljavan Collection is one of the online retailers of entirely silk handwoven carpets in Iran, offering a diverse collection of authentic and contemporary Iranian carpets.
2. The Azimzadeh Carpet Collection is one of the prominent brands in the Iranian handwoven carpet industry, founded by Ahad Azimzadeh. Through collaboration with renowned weavers and designers, this collection provides a significant online selection of Iranian carpets.
3. The term fractal is derived from the Latin word fractus, meaning an irregularly broken stone. In this sense, if a small part of a fractal is separated, it resembles the whole structure (Frants & Crannell, 2011, 140). Therefore, fractal patterns are repetitive geometric patterns that maintain similar structures at different scales. Today, fractals are widely used as important tools in computer graphics, and in recent years, carpets featuring fractal designs have also been produced.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Tofighi, P., Taheri, A., & Arbabi, B. (2026). Revisiting the Iranian carpet paradigm in the contemporary era: Evidence from neo-traditional carpets. *Bagh-e Nazar*, *23*(162), 45-62.

DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2026.574989.5992
URL: https://www.bagh-sj.com/article_248368.html?lang=en