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**CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE LANGUAGE OF
SYMBOLS OF IRANIAN AND SERBIAN KILIM ART**

Doctoral Dissertation

Belgrade, 2025

UNIVERZITET U BEOGRADU

FILOLOŠKI FAKULTET

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**КУЛТУРНА АНТРОПОЛОГИЈА И ЈЕЗИК СИМБОЛА
УМЕТНОСТ ИИРАНСКОГ И СРПСКОГ ЂИЛИМА**

Doktorska disertacija

Beograd, 2025.

УНИВЕРСИТЕТ БЕЛГРАДА
ФАКУЛЬТЕТ ФИЛОЛОГИИ

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**КУЛЬТУРНАЯ АНТРОПОЛОГИЯ И ЯЗЫК СИМВОЛОВ
ИРАНСКОГО И СЕРБСКОГО ИСКУССТВА КИЛИМА**

Докторская диссертация

Белград, 2025.

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Članovi komisije:

Datum odbrane:

And I am still crafting my dreams...

Thanks to my husband, who helps me shape them into reality, and to my children, the star motifs of my life, lighting my path. I am also deeply grateful to my dear mentor and the commission members for their guidance and support.

Cultural Anthropology and the Language of Symbols of Iranian and Serbian Kilim Art

Abstract

The research topic of this dissertation is the analysis of kilim motifs in Iran and Serbia, with the primary objective of identifying, categorising, and conducting a comprehensive comparative analysis of kilim motifs in these two regions. The thesis is divided into five chapters; each chapter describes the objective of the research in detail. By employing the theoretical framework of semiotics and semiotic anthropology, it examines and interprets the denotative, connotative, and socio-cultural meanings of kilim motifs.

The research methodology involves the collection and analysis of 200 kilims, 100 from five kilim-weaving tribes and regions in Iran, namely Qashqai, Bakhtiari, Khorasan, Azerbaijan, and Kurdistan, and 100 from Pirot in Serbia. Following the construction of the research corpus (kilim motif database), a three-layered classification system was developed to identify motifs based on their forms, types, and connotative meanings, which led to the design of the Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT). This resulted in identifying the 80 most common motifs, with 828 applied tags to the kilim samples to find the frequency, variants, and meanings of motifs.

Based on the corpus reports and conducting quantitative, qualitative, and comparative analyses, the research reveals the deeper meanings embedded in kilim motifs and highlights their role in cultural transmission. In terms of thematic domains, the findings indicate that Iranian kilim motifs primarily represent themes related to spirituality and divine, life and nature, reflecting a strong cultural and historical emphasis on mythical and religious concepts, as well as the significance of natural resources such as water and fertile land, which are highly valued in Iran's arid regions. In contrast, Serbian kilim motifs mainly reflect symbols related to social value concepts, protection, and power. Using such motifs reflect shared values and collective heritage of Serbian community.

These findings, which examine the connotative and symbolic meanings of the motifs based on underlying mythological, historical, cultural, and social layers, identify the connections between the motifs and the cultures they represent, later 8 sample kilims of Iranian and Serbian are analysed as a case study, and the motifs are described. In the final chapter, a model for identifying and classifying kilim motifs based on the theoretical framework of semiotics and semiotic anthropology is proposed. In conclusion, this research contributes to cultural and intercultural studies by exploring and analysing the motifs of Iranian and Serbian kilims. The findings highlight the motifs significance as representative symbols of community identity and heritage, which are deeply embedded in the rich traditions of both cultures.

Keywords: kilim motifs, semiotic anthropology, cultural studies, Iranian and Serbian kilims, motif classification

Research area: Cultural Studies

Research subarea: Cultural Studies, Semiotic Anthropology

UDC:

Kulturna antropologija i jezik simbola umetnosti iranskog i srpskog ćilima

Sažetak

Ovo istraživanje kao cilj ima analizu motiva koji se javljaju na ćilimima u Iranu i Srbiji, sa primarnim ciljem identifikacije, kategorizacije i sprovođenja sveobuhvatne komparativne analize motiva ćilima u ovim dvema kulturama. Disertacija je podeljena u pet poglavlja, pri čemu su u svakom poglavlju detaljno izloženi ciljevi istraživanja. Koristeći teorijski okvir semiotike i semiotičke antropologije, istraživanje ispituje i tumači denotativna, konotativna i sociokulturna značenja motiva na ćilimima.

Metodološki okvir istraživanja podrazumeva prikupljanje i analizu 200 ćilima, od kojih 100 potiče iz pet regija u Iranu, čuvenih po tkanju: Kaškaj, Bahtiari, Horsan, Azerbejdžan i Kurdistan, dok preostalih 100 dolazi iz Pirota, u Srbiji. Nakon formiranja istraživačkog korpusa (baze podataka motiva ćilima), razvijen je trostepeni klasifikacioni sistem, kako bi se identifikovali motivi na osnovu njihovih oblika, tipova i konotativnih značenja, što je dovelo do stvaranja „Tag-seta motiva” (Kilim Motif Tagset - KMT). Na ovaj način je identifikovano 80 motiva, pri čemu je na analizirane uzorke ćilima primenjeno ukupno 828 oznaka, kako bi se utvrdila učestalost, varijante i značenja motiva.

Na osnovu izveštaja korpusa motiva i sprovedenih kvantitativnih, kvalitativnih i komparativnih analiza, istraživanje pokazuje dublja značenja ugrađena u motive i ističe njihovu ulogu u kulturnoj transmisiji. U tematskom smislu, rezultati pokazuju da motivi iranskih ćilima u najvećoj meri izražavaju teme povezane sa duhovnošću, božanskim životom i prirodom, stavljajući snažan kulturno-istorijski akcenat na mistične i religijske koncepte, kao i značaj prirodnih dobara, poput vode i plodnog zemljišta, koji su od neprocenjivog značaja u sušnim predelima Irana. S druge strane, motivi srpskih ćilima najčešće simbolizuju društvene vrednosti, zaštitu i moć, čime se izražavaju zajedničke vrednosti i kolektivno nasleđe srpske zajednice.

Ovi rezultati, koji su odraz ispitivanja konotativnih i simboličkih značenja motiva kroz prizmu mitoloških, istorijskih, kulturnih i društvenih slojeva, otkrivaju veze između motiva, ali i kultura koje oni predstavljaju. Kasnije je analizirano osam uzoraka iranskih i srpskih ćilima kao studija slučaja, pri čemu su motivi detaljno opisani. U završnom poglavlju predložen je model za identifikaciju i klasifikaciju motiva na ćilimima, zasnovan na teorijskom okviru semiotike i semiotičke antropologije. Zaključak ove studije doprinosi istraživanjima u oblasti kulture i interkulturnih studija kroz analizu motiva iranskih i srpskih ćilima. Rezultati ističu značaj motiva kao reprezentativnih simbola identiteta i kulturnog nasleđa zajednica, duboko ukorenjenih u bogatim tradicijama oba naroda.

Ključne reči: motivi na ćilimima, semiotička antropologija, studije kulture, iranski i srpski ćilimi, klasifikacija motiva.

Naučna oblast: Studije kulture

Uža naučna oblast: Studije kulture, Semiotička antropologija

UDK:

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the research domain and introduces the central topic. It begins with an exploration of kilim weaving and its traditional background in Iran and Serbia. Key terms relevant to the research are defined and the theoretical framework for the study is described. Next, an overview of the methodology and research approach is provided. Finally, the chapter offers a detailed outline of the thesis structure and summarises the contents of the subsequent chapters.

1.1 Kilim Weaving and its Tradition

We live in a world where meaning is conveyed through signs, symbols, and conceptual motifs. For centuries, mostly women around the world wove kilims to meet their families' functional need for floor coverings, unaware that their crafts would one day be recognised as works of art as well. These textiles and specifically design, pattern and motifs on them have become the subject of scholarly study, as researchers attempt to decode the hidden meaning of motifs embedded within them.

The kilim is simply defined as “a flat woven rug or rug without a knotted pile” (Hull & Bernard, 1997, p. 5). American Heritage Dictionary (2022) indicates that the word kilim is a Turkish word, originally from the Persian kilim. Pooladi (2017, p. 30) noted that the word “kilim” originates from the Persian word “gelim,” which has been used since the first decades of the fourth century in the Persian language. This word has many variations used in different languages: “Kelim” in Afghanistan, “Kylym” in Ukraine, “Palas” in the Caucasus, “Bsath” in Syria and Lebanon, “Chilim” in Romania, and “Kilim” in Turkey, Poland, and Hungary (Hull & Bernard, 1997). Today, in Serbian and Persian language it is called “Ćilim”, and “Gelim”. Finding the exact origin of weaving kilims is not clear; however, since the oldest floor weaving, the Pazyryk Rug, dating around the 4th-3rd centuries B.C., has been found in a valley with this name in Siberia (Muccillo De Medeiros & De Medeiros, 2021, p. 160), it can be assumed that kilims, as a specific type of floor weaving for the aim of protection from the cold winters and decorations for the tents, were probably developed by nomads in the East and somewhere on the plains of Central Asia several thousand years ago. According to Taşkıran (2006), the art of kilim weaving is believed to have developed in Central Asia by nomadic inhabitants, or as they are called, “Yuruks.” During their migration, they faced severe climatic conditions, so they used goat hair in making the tents they lived in. Goat hair is stiffer than sheep's, thus making the tent almost waterproof. Later, they often used goat hair for floor coverings to avoid dampness in the tent and called them “kilims” (Taşkıran, 2006, p. 8). According to Hull and Bernard (1997 p. 5), kilims, together with jewelry, clothing, tent furnishings, helped to form the identity of the village or nomadic tribal group. Kilims were made for use on the floors and walls of tents, houses, and mosques, as well as animal covers and bags. Most were made for family and personal use, although some villages and towns of Persia and Turkey became notable for their fine commercial production in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Therefore, kilims, as textile floor coverings, were produced and developed traditionally during the centuries basically in tribes and villages all over Central Asia, the Middle East and the Balkans. For a very long time, kilims have been an essential piece of decorative, practical, and portable furniture.

1.1.1 The Art of Kilim Weaving in Iran and Serbia

The Silk Road has historically been one of the most significant routes of interactions, stretching from China in East Asia to the western Balkans and Europe. Beyond facilitating trades and business it served as a platform for cultural exchange. The Silk Road system has existed for over 2,000 years, with specific routes changing over time. Carrying not only goods and commodities but also art, architecture, philosophy, and religious ideas. (Kurin, 2000, p. 23). India, Iran, Anatolia, and the Balkans, positioned along the middle and western ends of the Silk Road, have had unique interactions, and in addition to trade, some cultural components such as religions, languages, customs, and traditions have also been exchanged. Textile floor coverings, such as rugs, carpets, and kilims, were among the goods traded along these routes and within these regions for a long time. In addition to being a commercial commodity, these types of hand-woven articles are considered manifestations of cultural interactions. Among

them, the kilim holds particular significance due to its weaving techniques, affordability, variety of motifs, and high production. A comparative study of motifs, patterns, and symbols on kilims can enhance the understanding of cultural interactions between Iran and Serbia. The art of weaving in Iran is believed to have spread through nomadic people who have always faced severe weather conditions and used goat wool in their textiles to cover the ground. The exact period of kilim weaving in Iran is not clear; however, there is some evidence that kilim weaving dates back to millennia B.C. For instance, the oldest preserved carpet in the world is the “Pazyryk Rug,” which was excavated in 1949 in Siberia (Rudenko, 1951, p. 8). Radiocarbon testing shows the age of this rug goes back to 500 years B.C.; therefore, it can be assumed that kilim weaving at least dates back to that period as well. Since the rug and carpet weaving is complicated and much more artistic than kilim weaving, it can be assumed that the art of kilim making in Iran dates back to a time long before the rug weaving.

Kilim in Iran is woven across the country, including in Khorasan, Baluchistan, Fars, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, and other provinces. Each region has its own distinctive style, weaving techniques, and motifs. Some of the most well-known kilim-weaving areas and tribes in Iran, known for their unique textiles and artistic motifs, include Shahsevan, Lori, Harsin, Kermanshah, Sene, Baluch, Qashqai, and Khamse kilims.

In Serbia, the term “kilim” (in Serbian, “Ćilim”) has been in use since the 16th century, reflecting its introduction following the arrival of the Turks in the Balkans and the subsequent influence of the oriental lifestyle in the region. Existing research confirms that the late 18th and 19th centuries were undoubtedly periods of significant development for this craft (Cvetković, 2015, p. 66; Petković & Vlatković, 1996, pp. 17, 22). According to Vlatković (2022, p. 33), the first recorded mention of kilims in written literature dates back to 1565 in Frankfurt, where it is noted that ships of “Šajkaši” people on the Danube and Drina were covered with kilims. This indicates that kilims were already in demand at that time and later became a significant trade article in this region. Serbs imported kilims from Romania, Turkey, Armenia, and other eastern countries and then exported them to the west. It is mentioned that merchants from Dubrovnik imported kilims from Turkey and exported them to the other countries in Western Europe. As a tradition, Ottoman sultans sent kilims and different kinds of expensive fabrics as gifts to Dubrovnik and the Republic of Venice. The high demand for kilims and rugs positively affected their production in the Ottoman Empire. During history, Serbian carpets and kilims, which were great in beauty and quality, decorated the rooms of Turkish sultans and Serbian and Bosnian royal rulers. Such woven floorings featured arrangements of motifs, patterns, and colours (Vitković-Žikić, 2001). The most well-known kilims of Serbia are from “Pirot”, a city in the southeast of Serbia, though in some other parts of the country, especially in Vojvodina, the art of kilim weaving has its own tradition. The origin of Pirot kilim weaving is not entirely clear. According to Velkova (2020, p. 29), “kilim-making came to Pirot from the east and Pirot Turks first started making kilims based on designs they had brought from their homeland, Asia Minor.”. Ćirić (1954, p. 115) also acknowledges the uncertain origin of the Pirot kilims, and suggesting that their early development was likely influenced by the Turkish period. Frfulanović-Šomođi *et al.* (2020, p. 45) indicated that the Pirot kilim, as a recognised brand, was recognised by the Serbian state during the second half of the 19th century as an authentic product of folk craftsmanship. It was presented at numerous fairs across European capitals starting in the early 20th century, introducing a new perspective on the culture and artistic creations of previously unrecognised women artisans.

1.2 Statement of Problem and Research Questions

As mentioned in the previous section, the study of kilim weaving in Iran and Serbia presents a diverse collection of cultural, artistic, and symbolic expressions. Although kilim weaving has a long tradition in these two regions, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no comprehensive and comparative study has been conducted to study the kilims of these two regions with the aim of identifying similarities and differences, especially in motifs, patterns, and symbols that reflect the culture, customs, and social life of the people of in these areas. This research primarily addresses the following questions:

- (1) What are the most common motifs, symbols, and patterns used in Iranian and Serbian kilims?
- (2) How do the motifs, patterns, and symbols in Iranian and Serbian kilims convey cultural, social, and individual expressions?
- (3) What are the similarities and differences in the motifs of Iranian and Serbian kilims, and how do they reflect broader cultural interactions and influences?
- (4) How can a semiotic anthropological approach clarify the layers of meaning and cultural significance embedded in kilim designs from both regions?

By exploring these questions, this thesis seeks to uncover the complex cultural narratives woven into kilims and develop a deeper understanding of the shared and diverse artistic expressions between Iran and Serbia. This study holds the potential to reveal the hidden layers of cultural, artistic, and anthropological significance of kilim motifs.

1.3 Purpose, Objectives, and Scope of the Research

The purpose of this dissertation is primarily to explore the rich tradition of kilim weaving and to study the motifs, symbols, and patterns in both Iran and Serbia. Kilims and their significant cultural and historical value. The objectives of this research are twofold. First, it conducts a thorough comparative study of the motifs, patterns, and symbols depicted on kilims in Iran and Serbia. By applying the theoretical framework of semiotic anthropology, this study seeks to decipher the cultural views, customs, and beliefs embedded in these artistic creations. Second, it aims to use the theory of semiotics to analyse how different cultures interpret and represent concepts through the motifs on kilims. This research aims to shed light on the cultural transactions and similarities between Iranian and Serbian traditions.

This study focuses on a comparative analysis of kilim motifs and patterns in Iran and Serbia. Therefore, the main focus of the research is on cultural studies, especially cultural anthropology, semiotics, mythology, and sociology. By studying and comparing kilim motifs in these two geographical regions, it is expected that the cultural similarities and differences rooted in their beliefs, customs, and myths will be identified. This dissertation will contribute to the broader field of cultural studies by providing a nuanced understanding of the cultural interactions and exchanges reflected in the motifs of Iranian and Serbian kilims. Through research and analysis, it aims to uncover the underlying cultural, artistic, and anthropological messages embedded in these textile masterpieces.

1.4 Key Terms: Symbols, Motifs and Patterns

Semiotics, as defined by Hartmann and Stork (1972, p. 205), "is the systematic study of linguistic and non-linguistic signs". According to Eco (1976, p. 7), a sign is a term, a word, a notion, a voice, or a visible picture that fulfills the function of signification. It symbolises objects, in reality; thus, substituting one object for another is the main function of a sign

(Chandler, 2007, p.p 1-2). Barthes (1977, p. 9) argues that semiology is based on understanding sign systems, analysing their operative structures, and thus explaining the structure of meaning. Jakobson (1960, p. 350-377) also suggests in his communication model that various elements of communication interact to produce meaning, emphasising the critical role of signs in this process.

Two key terms in the study of meaning in signs are “signifier” and “signified.” Saussure (1983) explains that a sign is the whole that emerges from the association of the signifier with the signified; therefore, a sign is a recognisable combination of a signifier with a particular signified. Peirce (1998, pp. 291-292) elaborated the relationship between the signifier and the signified into three main categories: “Iconic,” “Indexical,” and “Symbolic.” In an iconic sign, the sign and the object share a physical resemblance, such as a photograph of a person representing the actual person. When there is some physical connection between the sign and the object, such as the smoke, which signifies the fire, it is called an index, and the relationship is indexical. A symbol is a sign that refers to the object denoted by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object (Peirce, 1998, pp. 291-292).

1.5 Research Theoretical Framework and the Methodology

While kilims are used mainly as floor coverings, their cultural, artistic, and aesthetic aspects of weaving need to be noted. The study of designs, patterns, and, most notably, symbols and motifs on kilims suggests that weavers embed their beliefs, myths, wishes, and even worries into kilims as a means of transmitting these elements to the next generations. Ateş (2004, pp. 44-45) noted that for centuries kilims were woven with specific motifs intended to ward off natural threats such as storms, floods, extreme temperatures, death, or wild animals, which believed to be sent to them by gods. Prior to this, similar symbols were inscribed on rocks, and later, kilims were placed in graves as part of burial traditions. According to Anquetil (1994, p. 27), research on kilims from the late 19th century reveals that, for centuries, women used kilims as a medium for expressing emotions related to love, death, and fear through the patterns, as weaving was traditionally a female domain while men were engaged in hunting or warfare. Thus, each kilim carries its own “sub-text,” its own wealth of inherent intellectual, artistic, emotional, and sensory messages. Kilims, therefore, serve as cultural and psychological chronicles offering valuable insight into the social structures and traditions of past societies. To this end, “Semiotic Anthropology” is a theoretical approach employed in the present thesis for a comparative study of motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims. Segal (1983, p. 173) suggests that, from a semiotics perspective, culture depends on manipulating complex sign systems, and cultural activities, in large part, consist of the continuous transformation of meaning across different communicative systems.

Semiotic anthropology, as an approach, deals with symbolic and conventional meanings through analysing a broader contextual framework, which can be called “a society”. In this regard, semiotic anthropology explores how language, culture, and social structures contribute to the reproduction, transmission, and transformation of cultural meaning. (Mertz, 2007, p. 340). Motifs on kilims, as symbolic signs, can reflect the cultural perspectives, customs, traditions, beliefs, and attitudes towards life, the world, and the society of the weavers in particular and a tribe or an ethnic group in general. The study, analysis, and interpretation of such motifs across different societies (i.e., Iran and Serbia) can provide a better understanding of collective mentalities and the evolution of cultural identities.

Since a theoretical framework is needed for studying and analysing the symbols, patterns, and especially motifs depicted on kilims, “The Theory of Semiotics” is also employed as the theoretical framework in this research. This model facilitates the examination of how different

cultures (i.e., Iranian and Serbian) have interpreted various concepts, such as fear, happiness, fertility through kilim motifs. According to Eco (1976, p. 3), a “general semiotic theory should be able to explain every case of sign-function in terms of underlying systems of elements mutually correlated by one or more codes”; thus, the study of these codes, represented by motifs, could lead to a better understanding of cultural and artistic intersections between Iranian and Serbian kilim traditions

The present thesis, based on a methodological approach of “Semiotic Anthropology” and by constructing a database of motifs for analysing and comparing the motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims, is a unique study that explores the cultural interactions, similarities, and differences in these two regions and stays in the domain of “Cultural Studies”.

The methodology employed in this thesis follows the semiotic-anthropological theoretical framework to examine kilim motifs and patterns in both Iranian and Serbian contexts through a case study. It consists of three main phases: (1) constructing a comprehensive motif database, (2) developing an annotation model for motifs, and (3) performing statistical, descriptive analysis and comparative analyses of the motifs. Each phase is divided into distinct stages to ensure a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the topic, as outlined below:

Phase 1 focuses on building the kilim motif database and includes three stages:

- (1) *Data collection*: Iranian and Serbian kilim motifs will be chosen through a review of available sources. A total of 200 kilims from both selected regions will be selected to extract and analyse the various motifs. Additionally, standards for motif annotation will be defined considering the diverse forms motifs can take. It is essential to define some standards so that the annotation will be performed in a uniform manner. Applying these standards provide a systematic approach to motif recognition.
- (2) *Setting up the database*: After defining the standards and identifying kilim motifs, a Microsoft Excel database will be created to store the collected data.

Phase 2 introduces a model for motif annotation and consists of two steps:

- (1) *Development of a scheme for motif annotation*: A classification system will be established to find the most common motifs on kilims. The system works on three levels: motif placements, motif types, and motif meanings.
- (2) *Creation of a tagset for motif annotation*: A Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT) will be developed based on the proposed annotation scheme. This tagset organises motifs within a regional, structural, narrative, thematic, and connotative framework.

Phase 3 involves data analysis. There are three main types of analysis:

- (1) *Quantitative Analysis*: Statistical methods will be used to interpret findings based on reports obtained from the research database (corpus).
- (2) *Qualitative Analysis*: This analysis interprets the motifs through mythical, historical, cultural and anthropological aspects to identify the similarities and differences of kilim motifs in the two regions.
- (3) *Comparative Analysis*: This analysis provides a detailed comparison of motifs from both cultures, highlighting shared themes and unique elements across Iranian and Serbian kilims.

1.6 Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 overviews the main research topic and introduces the art of kilim weaving and describes its traditional roots in both Iran and Serbia. This is followed by essential definitions of key terms and, an outline of the theoretical framework of the study. The chapter then explains the research methodology approach. Finally, it provides a brief overview of the thesis structure, summarising the content of each chapter.

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature on this study. This chapter first introduces the kilim weaving traditions in Iran and Serbia and then reviews earlier literature on kilim weaving in these two regions. Later key terminologies and theories of semiotics are presented. Finally, the chapter introduces an innovative semiotic-anthropological framework to enable a more focused analysis of the kilim patterns and motifs and inviting alternate interpretative perspectives.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology, detailing the process of building a comprehensive kilim motif database and defining the requirements for data extraction and annotation. It also introduces the schema and tagset for motif annotation, enabling the motif classification and analysis to be more standardised and systematic.

Chapter 4 presents the research results and findings, organised into statistical, descriptive, and comparative sections. The statistical analyses examine reports obtained from the database, identifying similarities and differences between Iranian and Serbian motifs in terms of form and thematic domains. In the descriptive analysis section, the most frequent motifs are introduced and analysed based on their mythological, historical and cultural backgrounds, and in the comparative section, a comprehensive comparative analysis is presented.

Chapter 5 summarises the entire thesis, providing an overview of the research and the methodology used. The conclusions and findings derived from the data analysis, offering a comprehensive summary of the study's results. In addition, this chapter proposes a model for identifying and analysing kilim motifs. Some practical suggestions for the future research is also introduced in this chapter.

1.7 Conclusion of Chapter 1

This chapter introduces and outlines the central research topic of the thesis, aiming to frame the research by addressing its key components. It presents the main topics of the thesis in five sections, providing a clear roadmap for the study. The first section reviews the general background of the history of carpet and kilim weaving in Iran and Serbia. The second section introduces the research statement and questions, as well as the objectives and scope of the study. The third section presents the key terminologies, followed by the theoretical frameworks and the methodology of the research. The chapter covers the main objectives of the research, which are collecting and identifying kilim motifs, setting up a database (kilim motif corpus), and creating a comprehensive tagset for motif classification. Based on the corpus reports, qualitative and quantitative analyses will be conducted. Finally, a comparative study will provide a comprehensive analysis of kilim motifs from mythological, historical, cultural, and social perspectives to determine the similarities and differences of motifs in Iran and Serbia.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to this research. It critically reviews previous research and provides valuable insights and a comprehensive overview of essential concepts such as motifs, symbols, and patterns. It also uses semiotic and anthropological theories to build a strong foundation for the research.

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed overview of the literature that is relevant to the study. It starts with exploring historical and cultural aspects of kilim weaving, literature and research on kilim weaving in Iran and Serbia. The chapter offers insights and a general description of the key concepts: motifs, symbols, and patterns. It is also based on semiotic and anthropological theories that give a reliable theoretical basis for our research. Finally, the chapter offers a unique semiotic-anthropological approach that will provide insights for analytical interpretation and understanding of kilims with a particular emphasis placed on their motifs and patterns.

2.2 Historical and Cultural Significance of Kilim Weaving

“Kilim” generally refers to a smoothly woven carpet or a type without a pile or knotted loops. It is known by different names in different languages, such as “gelim” in Persian, “kilim” in Turkish, and “ćilim” in Serbian, each language having its variants. This flat weaving technique is common worldwide, from America to Scandinavia and Indonesia. Although there are similarities in the texture of these products, the different choices of materials and weaving techniques often result in striking differences. While nomadic kilims were not held in high regard until a few decades ago, they are increasingly valued for their decorative qualities. According to the Dehkhoda Dictionary (1925), the kilim is defined as “a renowned cover made of goat hair and sheep wool. A kilim is a type of carpet woven without a pile from wool, cotton, or hemp threads”. It is used as both a cushion and a decorative piece, using warp and weft techniques (Daneshgar, p. 470-1376).

2.2.1 Origins and Evolution of Kilim Weaving

While the oldest woven floor coverings in history can be dated to ancient times, establishing the exact timeline and geographic origin of the first carpets is still a challenge. Textile origins for basket and mat weaving are suggested by evidence from Mesopotamia and Africa. Experts believe the first human floor coverings and matting likely came from reeds and plant material. Plant fibers were the first major materials used for making fabrics and clothing. Through the weaving process, these fibers gave rise to various types of floor coverings, including carpets, among others. After the textile flooring, carpets appeared by nature at an early time, with a variety of designs, shapes, motifs, colour practices and aesthetics. Artistic elements were carefully included in this process, and over time, they became integral parts of carpet-making. Hand weaving have played a pivotal role in every civilization that humankind has ever known. Their impact can be found in the various forms of culture: the epic poems of Homer’s *Iliad and Odyssey*, the delicate paintings on the Egyptian tombs, the hallowed manuscripts of sacred scriptures. Some even claim that weaving predates human settlement. In 1944, a ground-breaking discovery shed light on the ancient origins of carpet making. The excavation of the “Pazyryk Carpet” in a kurgan (tomb) in the Altai Mountains in southern Siberia (Hann, 2006, p. 55) provided evidence that the origin of this carpet traces back to the ancient societies of the Iranian plateau and Central Asia (Böhmer & Thompson, 1991, p. 30). This crucial finding enables us to trace the beginnings of carpet weaving in that large region to a period between 1500 and 2000 B.C. However, according to Yavari (2014, p. 12) the history of carpet weaving goes back even further to about 3000 B.C., which coincides with the emergence of textile production, a craft that can be traced back to about 7000 B.C. Based on such historical records, it can perhaps be concluded that the Iranian plateau and Central Asia

were pioneering centres in the East in the production of carpets, kilims, and other types of floor coverings.

Rationally, the production of fabric floor coverings can be attributed to the patterns of seasonal migration. Despite the hardships pastoral communities faced and the harsh desert environment, these challenges did not prevent the development of such crafts. Weaving is an incomparable and classic art to meet the basic needs of farmers and migrants with solid and carpeted tents, warm bedding, rugs, and kilims. Weaving has developed in a similar, linear way from area to area and era to era. In fact, the pastorate way of life (the breeding of sheep, goats, horses and camels) was of great importance for guaranteeing a raw material for the continuous supply of wool and sewing. Advancements in plant cultivation and exploration of various plant and animal sources directly increased the dye preparation.

Kilims are traditionally made using woollen yarns, so they come out more flexible and their texture are much softer and smoother, resulting in simpler weaving techniques. However, the weaving techniques vary across the different regions. According to Afrough and Ghashghaeifr (2019, p. 185) “weaving techniques are the most important element in the structure and formation of handwoven textiles and the creation of motifs. The weaving technique shapes the structure of the handwoven textile and, in a way, defines its technical essence as well as a part of its identity and authenticity.” Nevertheless, the extent to which traditional kilim weaving techniques have changed worldwide remains an essential subject of study. In addition to kilim weaving and its techniques, kilim producers or weavers are also noteworthy. Kilim weaving was an integral part of women's lives, functioning as both a crucial element of their dowry and a means of income. Mastering this skill was a necessity for brides. The weaving is, of course, mostly women’s work, woven into the daily round of all members of a tribe. Kilim styles changed significantly from one generation to the next through inter-tribal marriages.

2.2.2 Kilim Diversity: Types and Weaving Techniques

In a structural classification, kilim analysis can be examined from four dimensions: (1) types of weaving, (2) techniques and methods of weaving, (3) design, pattern, and motifs, and (4) colour. A comprehensive assessment of these factors contributes to a deeper understanding of the origins and characteristics of regional kilims, e.g., kilims in Iran and Serbia. While this study primarily investigates the design, patterns and motifs of kilims, comparing those from Iran and Serbia, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of understanding weaving types and techniques as well. According to Sadeghpuri (2016), kilims types in Iran can be classified to two general classes:

- (1) *Simple or two-element kilims*: These kilims consist of warp and weft only. There are different types of kilims such as groove kilims, small grooves, balanced or woven, webs (“jajim baft”), weft or powder, single-pattern or mesh, double twists or molds, and warped wefts.
- (2) *Composite or three-element kilims*: In addition to warp and weft, these kilims have an additional element called Qayeq. It is used to form complicated patterns such as needle work kilims and Verni.

Saadati *et al.* (2022, p. 56) propose another classification for types of kilims, which are:

- (1) *Simple Kilims*: These types of kilims have the patterns woven on the both sides with the grafting technique. They are versatile and can be used in various situations.
- (2) *Single-sided Kilims*: Also referred to as Kilim Yekru or Kilim Sumak, they are made by the wefting production method. Their profile is thinner and has a textured surface, with motifs visible from only one side.

- (3) *Single-sided Kilims (non-Sumak)*: These types include kilims made with a combination of weaving methods, such as simple kilim texture, Sumak kilim weaving texture, and sometimes even the full knot weaving method.

Regarding the techniques and methods of weaving, Jazayeri (1991, p. 35) investigates the classification of kilims according to weaving devices and distinguishes four techniques and methods of kilim weaving based on the function of these devices:

- (1) *Simple woven kilim*: In this method, the kilim is woven uniformly on the panel, resulting in both sides being identical and usable.
- (2) *Weaving wheel kilim*: When the weaving wheel is used, the technique of weave is different, since the weft always goes through all the threads of the warp. To strengthen the thickness of the kilim for domestic use, extra warp threads are used on the back of the kilim, resulting in noticeable outsides and backs.
- (3) *Jajim weaving (Jajim baf)*¹: The kilims that are woven with this machine look distinct from those woven with other machinery because of their coloured threads, which have a very high influence on the appearance of the weft. The back and top resemble the back and top of a simple woven kilim.
- (4) *Needle kilim (Sumak)*: In this type of kilim texture, the additional wefts hang loosely behind the kilim. Expectedly, this kind of kilim is generally used for decorative purposes.

In Serbian kilim weaving tradition, according to Cvetković (2016, p. 11), “the actual weaving is done using the so-called “flat weaving” or “tapestry weaving” technique, where each pattern is woven separately using fingers. The yarn for the weft is wound into bundles or balls of different colours. The key aspect of this technique is highly skilled fingers, as they are used to draw warp threads and form the shed and then insert the weft yarn of the required colour, form the shed again and repeat the procedure. After each change of colour, the already woven part is pushed into place with a reed. Patterns are woven diagonally across the warp; thereby a compact surface is formed, without any slits. If they are woven in the same direction as the warp, slits are formed and such a kilim is less durable.

Živadinović (2022, p. 47) also refers to kilim weaving techniques as “the term *Klečeni* (hand-made) implies the use of a technique where multi-coloured weft threads are woven on a plain-colour warp, making patterns that are narrower than the entire width of the weave. The pattern is obtained by lifting the chosen white threads of the warp with your fingers and then passing a small bundle of coloured yarn (weft) through the resulting opening. The bundles are called *Gužvice* or *Kanure*. The weft is then pressed with a metal comb named *tupica*, creating firm wool fabric and contributing to higher density and prolonged life of the kilim. Each side of the kilim may last up to a hundred years, as evidenced by numerous specimens of 19th century kilims that look completely new.”

Hall and Barnard (1999, p. 13-18), provide a wide and detailed range of kilim weaving methods, including: (1) Balanced simple weaving or woven mat, (2) Weft-visible weaving, (3) Cleft weaving, (4) Round weaving, (5) Single twist weaving, (6) Double twist weaving, (7) Extra weft weaving and curved weft, (8) Swallowtail weaving, (9) Web weaving, (10) Jajim, (11) Sumak, and (12) Shiriki twist weaving.

In conclusion, kilims differ from each other in type, technique, pattern, and colour. By knowing the composition of kilims according to structural class, types of weaving, techniques,

¹ Jajim is a thicker textile, like a blanket, made from wool, cotton, or a mix of both. Unlike regular kilims and carpets that are one piece, Jajim is made by sewing together multiple narrow woven panels, usually four of them. (Huang, 2014, p. 79)

patterns and motifs, it helps us in gaining better understanding in regional context and cultural origins, particularly in regions like Iran and Serbia.

2.3 An Overview of Kilim Weaving in Iran and Serbia

Kilim weaving is a traditional art industry rooted in the cultural heritage of Iran and Serbia. The compositional techniques, colours, motifs and patterns of kilims in these regions can also reflect social, cultural, mythological and artistic values. In Iran, carpet and kilim weaving, which has a long and rich history, are closely connected to the country's rich handcrafts, known for their bright colours and detailed patterns that differ by region. In Serbia, kilim weaving also represents an essential aspect of the country's cultural identity, blending local traditions with influences from neighbouring cultures. This section provides an overview of kilim weaving, its history and the regions where this craft was practiced in these two countries.

2.3.1 Kilim Weaving in Iran

Before discussing the kilim weaving in Iran, it is necessary to mention the history of Persian carpets, in which kilims are also included. According to one of the oldest historical documents, Xenophon, in 400 B.C. and in his book *Anabasis*, mentions Iranian carpets:

“Next he went to Timasion the Dardanian, for he heard that he had some Persian drinking cups and carpets and said that it was customary when Seuthes invited people to dinner, for those who were thus invited to give him presents.”

(Xenophon, *Anabasis*, VII.3.27)²

This document reveals that Iranians have had and developed carpet production for at least two thousand years. According to Zhuleh (2020, p. 18), “There are records of weaving on ancient fictile stamps. In a found sample, there are patterns of people spinning warps around some wooden or metal rod which is either vertically planted in the ground or is placed on some form of base. The beginning of the weaving process for floor coverings, especially carpet's, is almost the same as these patterns on the found fictile stamps; on one of the found stamps it shows a woven piece (a piece of cloth or floor covering such as a carpet) and loose warps come out of the woven piece. Even though these stamps are old, their pattern can be seen in real life today as in some weaving centers in Iran, people still use looms as described. Arguably some of the oldest findings about carpet weaving in Iran are carpet hook knives found in some historical sites. These findings prove that in the 1st millennium B.C. carpet weaving was popular among Iranians, specially from north to southwest region of Iran. It seems likely that in places in-between these specific weaving centers, carpet weaving was also popular among residents. Russian archaeologist, Igor Khlopin, managed to find some other type of weaving tool which looks a lot like weaving knives (used by Iranian weavers today) in central Asia. These tools are also dated back to the 1st millennium B.C. and they show the popularity of carpet weaving among Iranians in places that once belonged to the Persian empire.

The Persian carpet has always been regarded as a unique commercial commodity; however, according to Yavari (2014, p. 13), “the golden age of carpet weaving in Iran dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries, during the luxurious life at the Safavid court, which can be

² τούτους μὲν οὖν οὕτως ἔπειθεν. αὐτῆς δὲ Τιμασίῳ τῷ Δαρδανεῖ προσελθόν, ἐπεὶ ἤκουσεν αὐτῷ εἶναι καὶ ἐκπώματα καὶ τάπιδας βαρβαρικὰς, ἔλεγεν ὅτι νομίζοιτο ὅποτε ἐπὶ δεῖπνον καλέσαι Σεύθης δωρεῖσθαι αὐτῷ τοὺς κληθέντας (Xen. anab. VII.3.18).

called the “*Renaissance of Carpets*”. During this period, carpets were woven with gold and silver threads, examples of which still exist today. A Safavid period carpet isn’t just any carpet, it’s a special one from Iran. The patterns on it are like those found on other Iranian carpets, and they’re full of many beautiful designs.” These designs, patterns and motifs tell a story about where the carpet was made, like a birth certificate showing its unique identity and origin. For instance, the carpets of Azerbaijan region of Iran have big flowers like tulips while the carpets of the Mughan plain have very delicate flowers, the carpets of Sanandaj and Bijar have red flowers and the carpets of central regions of Iran have more geometric patterns. The Safavid era left a remarkable legacy of carpets, rugs and kilims, impressive examples of which can be seen today in museums and private collections. Some of them are among the most valuable woven carpets in the world³.

It’s essential to highlight that carpet weaving has been a significant and longstanding tradition in Iran, serving as both an artistic expression and a thriving commercial industry for centuries. Consequently, the art of carpet weaving holds greater prominence compared to other types of floor coverings, including kilims. In Iran, the historical depth of carpet studies far exceeds that of kilims, underscoring the enduring importance of carpet craftsmanship in the country. Although it remains a challenge to determine the exact origin and timing of fabric floor covering, it can be said “kilim” was initially used as a means to protect the body from the cold. The tribesmen would throw a kind of woollen rug on their shoulders and wear it for sleeping and rest, using the same carpet as a cover.

Despite the widespread use of kilim weaving in the geographical and ethnic regions of Iran and its eternal importance, it is mainly attributed to nomadic societies. Kilims are not just a reflection of nomadic and village identity, but also represent family wealth, with many households owning at least one of these traditionally woven textiles. Kilims, in addition to rugs and carpets, have long been an integral part of a bride’s dowry in traditional Iranian nomadic and rural households. In fact, different textile items like kilims, pillows, backrests, etc. are produced and woven neatly and artistically for the same purpose in traditional environments as well. Kilims reflect the identity of villagers and nomads and have been in the wealth of people and tribes. Most of Iran’s kilim weaving centres are integrated within the nomadic clans. The Shahsevan, Qashqai, Bakhtiari, and Afshar are some of the major ones.

This section provides an overview of the main regions in Iran known for kilim weaving. Due to the diverse and numerous locations for kilim weaving, the regions are classified into two main groups: (1) Nomadic and tribal regions where kilims are woven, and (2) Specific regions known for their distinct kilim styles.

³ At the time of writing this thesis, the most expensive carpet ever sold at an international auction is an Iranian Safavid-era (17th century) Kerman rug, known as the “Clark Sickle-Leaf Rug.” This carpet was sold for \$33.8 million at a Sotheby’s auction held in New York in July 2013 (BBC News, 2013).

2.3.1.1 Shahsevan Kilims

The Shahsevans are a prominent tribe in northwest Iran, with ancestors mainly from Turkic backgrounds, though some also have Kurdish ties. Shahsevan society is composed of numerous Oghuz Turks, but it also includes significant populations of Kurds, Georgians, and Tajiks (Tanavoli, 1991, pp. 17-18). Kilims are well-known to the Shahsevans, as they are an essential part of their daily life and customs, serving as the main floor covering in their homes. They are well-known for their skill at producing woven masterpieces. Shahsevan carpets are distinguished by their prominent and grand patterns that are skilfully woven in consecutive lines. They have a variety of weaving techniques, but the most popular one is known as Sumak (or Verni in Turkish). Known for their intricate construction and unique appearance, this type of kilim is well-known. The main location of the Shahsevan tribes is in the Mughan Plain, a vast fertile area, west of the Aras River in northwest Iran. The tribe is branched into various small subgroups across regions like Mughan, Hashtroud, Varamin, Mianeh, Bijar, Khamseh, Qazvin, and Saveh. All these groups add their diversity to the craft of kilim weaving. Hence, each region has its own distinctive kilim designs, colours, and structural elements that convey the variety of Shahsevan tradition. Each tribe in this group has its distinct style of weaving. Their carpets and kilims are not only beautiful, but also represent their history and identity. Shahsevan motifs can be found in various regional weavings, including of Verni's kilims. Turkic, Kurdish, Georgian, and Tajik cultures have significantly influenced their artistic output. Figure 1 presents a sample of a Shahsevan kilim (Hall & Barnard, 1999, p. 60).



Figure 1. A representative example of a Shahsevan kilim

2.3.1.2 Bakhtiari Kilim

The Bakhtiari tribes are mainly concentrated in the western central plains of Iran and the beautiful Zagros Mountains, an environment in which they have adapted and lived for many centuries. They speak a unique language, a combination of Farsi and Lori, which is fascinating in its own right. Their kilims, the flat textiles woven centuries ago, are distinguished by their unique patterns, colours, and styles and are still passed down through generations. Bakhtiari kilims are known for their long and narrow shapes, which are typically used as wall hangings or prayer rugs. Known for their vibrant and colourful patterns, these textiles often contain bright tones of yellow, blue, red and orange. They are inspired by the natural beauty of the landscapes they live in and carry significant cultural meanings. Unlike the case with many other weaving traditions, the Bakhtiari do not follow a particular, static design and motifs. Instead, their designs and patterns are closely intertwined with their customs, habits, perceptions, inspiration, and the environment of their place (Dadvar & Moazen, 2009, p. 42) . One of the top Bakhtiari kilims is the “Shushtar kilim” that reflects the rich culture of the tribe. The patterns and symbols interwoven into these kilims typically represent elements of everyday life, nature and their culture and offer a glimpse into the worldview of the Bakhtiari people. The artist behind each kilim has their own relationship with the soil and nature, which is expressed through their work. Sample of Bakhtirari kilim (Hall & Barnard, 1999, p. 45) is shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. A representative example of a Bakhtiari kilim

2.3.1.3 Qashqai Kilim

The Qashqai tribe is one of the largest and most prominent tribes in Iran who primarily inhabit the southwestern province of Fars. Most Qashqai people speak a Turkic dialect, serving as a significant reminder of their history. The Qashqai tribe originates from the 16th century Turkish-speaking armies that invaded northern Iran (Yavari, 2014, p. 96). These groups would migrate southward and eventually settle into their current regions. As a result of this historical interrelationship, their cultural heritage has remained with a profound effect on the features of their kilim designs. These early migrations are also why we see a similarity between some Qashqai kilim patterns and those originating in the Caucasus. Qashqai kilims are among the most well-known in Iran and are celebrated worldwide for their quality and artistic beauty. These textiles are distinguished for a number of reasons, including their handwoven craftsmanship, use of natural dyes, their durability, and stunningly designs and motifs. These textiles are mostly decorated with lively geometric patterns and motifs with profound significance that speak to their connection to nature and nomadic existence. According to Dadvar and Momenian (2006, p. 50) “the Qashqai are renowned for their adaptability and exceptional craftsmanship, particularly their proficiency in wool dyeing: a process in which wool is dyed into a wide range of colours, and their astounding proficiency in the natural kilim weaving”. It is a combination of traditional knowledge and artistic artistry that has made Qashqai kilims sought after both locally and internationally. These textiles are not only used for practical purposes but also represent a cultural identity, which makes them a significant aspect of the Qashqai peoples’ heritage. Figure 3 presents a sample of a Qashqai kilim (Hall & Barnard, 1999, p. 37).



Figure 3. A representative example of a Qashqai kilim

2.3.1.4 Afshar Kilim

Afshar is one of the well-known tribes of the country of Iran and their traditions have covered the heart of the country. Ethnically and linguistically, especially their Iranian customs and habits, Afshars are all from the Oghuz Turks tribe of Azerbaijan. The Afshars, unlike many other tribes, which are limited to a specific area, are distributed on a wide scale in Khuzestan, Azerbaijan, Khorasan, Kerman, and other provinces. Migrating throughout time has allowed them to adapt to new regions but their preservation of their unique traditions and culture. One of the most well-known types of Afshar tribe kilim is the “Pichbaf Kilim”, which has a special place in the Kerman tribe. According to Parvan (2015, p. 37), the Afshar and Bachaghi tribes are the main contributors to this type of kilim production. This group of tribes migrated centuries ago from Azerbaijan to the region of Kerman with their advanced weaving skills and a rich cultural heritage. It is called the “Shiriki Pich Kilim” from the “Pichbaf Kilim” in recent decades. Afshar kilims differ tremendously from region to region, and woven carpets from places like Khuzestan, Azerbaijan, Khorasan, and Kerman are each decorated with different patterns and motifs in different colour combinations. Technically, these variants reflect how local resources shape Afshar weaving, showing adaptability while preserving traditions. Figure 4 presents a sample of a Afshar kilim (Hall & Barnard, 1999, p. 54).



Figure 4. A representative example of a Afshar kilim

2.3.1.5 Khamseh Kilim

The Khamseh confederation is a union of five major tribes located in southern Iran: the Arab, Basseri, Aynalu, Baharlu, and Nafar. The name “Khamseh”, meaning “five” in Arabic, symbolises the alliance of these groups (Barth, 1961, p. 618). Despite their linguistic diversity, two tribes speak Arabic, two use Turkic dialects, and the Basseri tribe speaks Persian, they are united by a shared tradition of kilim weaving, which has become a central cultural practice. The Khamseh tribes mostly inhabit the southwestern province of Fars, and their kilims are included in the wider textile traditions of the area (Yavari, 2014, p. 98). These kilims are known for dark, earthy backgrounds with complex diagonal clusters of stars woven into overlapping diamonds. Historically, this type of star kilim was made in narrow widths and then stitched together to create bigger textile pieces. With the white backgrounds and wider dimensions, it is easy to see how the styles have changed in recent years, but the tradition of Khamseh weaving remains. According to Yavari (2014, p. 98), “the Afshars have had a significant influence on the composition of Khamseh weavings, as the people of the Khamseh tribes often incorporate kilim designs from other tribes. As a result, some of their works have a strong resemblance to Afshar handwoven textiles”. Figure 5 presents a sample of a Khamseh-Basseri kilim (Parham, 1992).



Figure 5. A representative example of a Khamseh kilim

2.3.1.6 Kurdistan Kilim

Kurdish kilims, woven in the western regions of Iran with a focus on the Kurdish lands, represent a colourful and key aspect of the region's culture. Each with a unique contribution to this rich tradition of kilim weaving in the region, these handwoven carpets are made in the different cities and villages across Kurdistan. Some of the most well-known kilim-producing regions are Sanandaj, Seneh, Sahneh, Harsin, and Bijar. All these regions have their own style and technique of making this craft, resulting in many types of motifs that represent this deep artistry and cultural diversity of the Kurds. The beauty and strength of these kilims, combined with the incredible skill that went into their production, make kilims highly desired inside the country as well as abroad. In Iran, there is a province called Kurdistan, but Kurds also inhabit the provinces of Kermanshah, Ilam and West Azerbaijan. Thus, when in this thesis is meant "Kurdish kilims", it does not exclude the kilims that are woven in those regions. But the term "Kurdistan kilim" is more specific than that and describes those from the Kurdistan Province, which is home to the capital city of Sanandaj. Such a distinction demonstrates the differences between regions within the Kurdish world. Figure 6 presents a sample of a Kurdistan kilim (Hall & Barnard, 1999, p. 62).



Figure 6. A representative example of a Kurdistan kilim

2.3.1.7 Khorasan Kilim

Khorasan kilim comes from the east and north-east of Iran bordering Afghanistan and Turkmenistan in Central Asia. Several ethnic groups, including the Kurds (Kormanj), Baluch, and Turkmen tribes, reside in this region. These tribes were relocated to this region during the 16th century by the Safavid rulers for strategic purposes due to the need to strengthen resistance to attacks from the Uzbeks in Central Asia. Although many cultures intermingled over centuries, the kilims from this area kept their unique attributes in an array of colours and designs according to each tribe's identity. Kurdish designs typically feature bold geometric shapes and bright colours, for example, while Baluch kilims are more often set in softer colours and detailed patterns. Some symbols in the cultural identity are influenced by Turkmen. So, within these three groups of people, the result is a kilim style that incorporates aspects of all of them, leading to a broad and varied tradition. Their kilim productions reflect not only the skill of the weavers, but also the history and resilience of the communities where they are produced. This makes Khorasan kilim a truly unique example of cultural mixing, which results in new and meaningful expressions in art. Figure 7 presents a sample of a Khorasan kilim (Hall & Barnard, 1999, p. 68).



Figure 7. A representative example of a Khorasan kilim

2.3.1.8 Turkmen Kilim

The Iranian Turkmen community primarily resides in the north-eastern regions of Iran, particularly in the provinces of North Khorasan and Golestan, which border Turkmenistan. This area is well known for its rich history and expertise in traditional arts and crafts, especially the creation of handmade textiles such as carpets, kilims, poshti (small cushions), and khorjin (saddle bags). Turkmen weavings are characterised by their patterns and symbolic motifs, and by bright colours, especially red. This is what distinguishes Turkmen kilims from other regional styles. Turkmen kilims are recognised for weaving a lightweight fabric that is simultaneously solid; the end result is both functional and durable. They use red as the primary tint for all their textiles. This red is often presented in various shades, rich burgundy to bright crimson, depending on which natural dyes and weaving technique are used. Each colour is meaningful and contributes to the overall idea. In addition, the use of bright colours in combinations with classic patterns is a vivid reflection of artistic talent and cultural identity among the Turkmen. It cannot be separated from their kilim weaving tradition. Turkmen kilims are known in Iran for their durability, unique Turkmen designs, and distinctive weaving techniques. Figure 8 presents a sample of a Turkmen kilim (Afrough & Kazemnejadi, 2023, p. 79)



Figure 8. A representative example of a Turkmen kilim

2.3.1.9 Baluchestan Kilim

The Baluch people, residing in southeastern Iran and, in particular, in the Iranian province of “Sistan and Baluchestan” possess a unique style in the carpet and kilim weaving, reflected in their traditional weavings. A particularly distinctive technique they use is known as “Mina Khani.” This technique of woodblock typing creates a striped pattern on the fabric surface, and every row is filled in with different designs and motifs. Adding this technique allows Baluchi textiles to have a diverse appearance, making them instantly recognizable. What differentiates Baluchi carpets and kilims at their best is the colour palette. A lot of times these turn out to be warm or earthy colours (deep browns, camel colours, and at times dark reds or dark blues). They use earthy colours that give their woven artwork a distinctiveness and reflect the province’s natural environment. Baluchi textiles and kilims are known for their bright colours, designs, and patterns. Weaving these beautiful kilims is a highly skilled process that has been passed down through generations in the Baluchi community. The symbols and motifs in their kilims reflect daily life, beliefs, and artistic expression. As a result, they are now regarded as significant cultural artifacts that not only serve their purpose but also continue to be admired by people in Iran and around the world. Figure 9 presents a sample of a Baluchestan kilim (Hosuri, 1992, p. 164).



Figure 9. A representative example of a Baluchestan kilim

In conclusion, the widespread weaving of kilims across different regions suggests that this craft is deeply rooted in the nation's heritage. Kilim weaving mainly developed in nomadic tribes as well as villages and some cities. These nomads have played a key role in preserving this art forms and their ancient weaving techniques mostly reflect various designs and techniques applied in Iranian kilims. Some of these tribes did, however, settle in villages and cities; they continued to weave in their own unique style and tradition. This kind of practice indicates not only the importance of kilim weaving among Iranian nomadic and rural communities but also the deep connection in craftsmanship. In addition to the diverse tradition of kilim weaving by different geographical regions in Iran, a variety of handwoven textile products have been made to meet the various needs of life. Although these textiles can be similar in texture, patterns, designs, motifs and weaving quality to kilims, they serve different functions and differ from kilims. These handwoven textures can be categorised into three types based on their application, as follows:

- (1) *Floor coverings*, such as Zilu, Palas, Jol, Joval, Gabbe;
- (2) *Carrying items*, like baskets, salt bags, and tablecloths;
- (3) *Animal coverings*, for horses and camels, including saddlebags.

2.3.2 Kilim Weaving in Serbia

Kilim weaving holds a unique place in Serbia's cultural heritage. Unlike Iran, where kilim production is one among several types of fabric floor coverings, such as carpets (Farsh), Gabbe, Jajim, and Zilu, Serbia's focus is primarily on kilim (Ćilim) weaving, with production concentrated in Vojvodina in the north and notably in the city of Pirot in the south. In Serbia, the term "kilim" (in Serbian, "Ćilim") has been used since the 16th century, reflecting its introduction following the arrival of the Turks in the Balkans and the subsequent influence of the oriental lifestyle in the region. The most worldwide well-known kilims of Serbia are from "Pirot", a city in the southeast of Serbia, and in some other parts of the country especially in Vojvodina the art of kilim weaving has its own tradition. The origin of Pirot kilim weaving is not entirely clear, making it difficult to determine its exact beginnings. According to Velkova (2020, p. 29), "kilim-making came to Pirot from east and Pirot Turks first started making kilims after designs they had brought from their homeland, Asia Minor". Ćirić (1954, p. 115) also indicates the unknown origin of Pirot kilim and suggests that the origin and early development of Pirot's kilim production were likely determined by the Turkish period. Existing research confirms that the late 18th and 19th centuries were undoubtedly periods of significant development for this craft (Cvetković, 2015, p. 66; Petković and Vlatković, 1996, pp. 17, 22). Cvetković (2019, p. 23) also confirms that the peak of Pirot kilim weaving occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries under Ottoman influence. The Pirot kilim is a symbol of Balkan heritage, valued for its vibrant colours, high-quality wool, and intricate geometric patterns. The development of Pirot kilim production was strongly influenced by the region's location and its long history of sheep farming, which provided the high-quality wool essential for their creation.

Vlatković (2013) describes the four principal periods of Pirot kilim production, each defined by its techniques, design, and cultural context, as follows: First phase (16th century), Kilim weaving in Pirot started in the 16th century with simple, undyed products specialized for household use. Those earliest woven pieces were designed for functional uses such as those for floor coverings and bedding. Second phase (17th -18th centuries), the technical and artistic production of Pirot kilims developed in the 17th and 18th centuries. The vertical "Pirot loom" was introduced, which enabled more complex woven designs with geometric motifs. Kilims began to be dyed in their time (plain-dyed kilims were usually dark yellow in colour) not only for household purposes; they were in fact used within the military of the Turkish army as well. It was a time of heightened demand from Serbian merchants and the growing importance of

the kilims as functional and decorative goods. Third phase (19th century), in 19th century, the greatest technical and artistic peak of Pirot kilims was achieved. It is a period of complex ornamentation, lavish colour palette, and greater variety of patterns, especially floral. The kilims were in high demand both locally and internationally, a testament to the remarkable artisanal skill of the area. The fourth phase (20th century), the art of weaving techniques reached all time high along with the synthetic dyes replacing the natural ones. This led to an even wider range of colours, resulting in clearer design delineations in kilims. The kilims, despite changing dyes and materials, maintained their unique, individualistic style. The craft was still a woman-dominated profession, and although designs became more regulated, each piece retained its own artistic touch through various colour combinations and motif preferences (Vlatković, 2013, pp. 19–22).

Throughout all the above phases, Pirot kilims have preserved their functional and artistic authenticity. The uniqueness of each kilim comes from its blend of tradition with artistic invention and local craftsmanship. Pirot kilims are carefully designed and skilfully crafted, are highly appreciated and exhibited in museums, and recognised as iconic of Serbian weaving by experts. Frfulanović-Šomođi *et al.* (2020, p. 45) indicated that the Pirot kilim, as a brand, was recognised by the Serbian state during the second half of the 19th century as an authentic product of folk craftsmanship. Therefore, in the early 20th century, Pirot kilims were presented at numerous fairs and exhibitions across European capitals and later introduced to the world as a distinguished brand of kilim weaving art and industry, a tradition that continues to this day.

The Pirot kilim is often considered a symbol of national identity for Serbia. While Pirot has long been the heart of its production, this type of kilim is part of a wider Balkan weaving practice. Today, Pirot-style kilims are found across the region, from Bosnia to Turkey. The town's Turkish name, Şarköy, which translates to “neither village nor town”, has also influenced the naming of similar carpets produced in modern-day Turkey, known as “sarkoy” or “sharkoy” rugs (Museum of Applied Art, Belgrade, 2015). In 2012, the Pirot rug was included in the National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia (Ministry of Culture and Information, Republic of Serbia, n.d., “List of Elements”). Figure 10 presents a sample of a Pirot kilim (Cvetković, 2016, p. 264).



Figure 10. A Representative Example of a Pirot Kilim

2.4 Existing Literature and Research on Kilim Motifs in Iran and Serbia

Motifs and designs woven into Iranian and Serbian kilims have been a subject of interest for researchers from many fields, including art and culture, history, semiotics and ethnology. This section presents a literature review of academic research, including theses, scientific articles, and publications on this subject. Before studying the academic research resources, such as the master and Ph.D. dissertations, the scholarly works, and the books written about Iranian and Serbian kilims, it is vital to refer to the basic sources. These sources are widely cited in multiple publications and viewed as required reading. *The book "Kilim: The Complete Guide, History, Pattern, Technique, Identification"* by Alastair Hull and José Luczyc-Wyhowska (1993) valuable resource for collectors and scholars, offering a detailed look at kilims from various regions. The eleven chapters of this book fully cover kilim weaving, ranging from North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia), through Anatolia, Iran (the Kurds of Iran, the Shahsevan, Lor, Bakhtiari, Qashqai, Khamse, Afshar, other cities), the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and Central Asia (Turkmen, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Imaqs, Mukurkochis). With added depth in understanding the different forms of kilims and the intricacies of kilim weaving techniques, this book distinguishes between geographical types as well. In the third chapter the authors skilfully explore the form and significance of motifs, linking their significance with local beliefs, superstitions, customs, and cultural details. Such an extensive look serves not only the understanding of kilims but also brings brilliant perspectives on the societies that formed their characteristics over the decades. The book analyses kilims from various regions in a thoughtful, orderly way. It reviews the geography, history, and significant events that shaped the cultural character of each region and then presents a perceptive and comprehensive study of the various types of kilims. In addition to this, the book contains a wealth of detailed analysis of some kilims including its design elements, size, margins and body and cultural significance of sample kilims. Despite the detailed and systematic approach in this book, the authors did not include the Serbian Pirot kilim. This could be due to the limited availability of information on Serbian kilims or because the authors chose to focus on other regions known for producing kilims..

2.4.1 Overview of Previous Studies and Publications on Iranian Kilim Motifs

In the last two decades, kilims, their types, designs, and motifs have been a field of research interest in the field of studies of Iranian universities. Researchers have discussed these issues from different perspectives and have highlighted the particular traits that distinguish kilims from traditional rugs. Kilim studies, alongside carpet studies, are growing due to extensive research in Iran. Numerous studies, including research, master's and doctoral dissertations, and research articles by students and scholars in this field, show that a variety of approaches and methods have been presented for kilim studies. To achieve the best result in reviewing previous studies, relevant research on the topic was gathered through searches of databases, such as the National Library of Iran⁴, Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (*Irاندو*)⁵, Iran's Publications Database (*Magiran*)⁶, the database of the Institute for Science Citation and Observatory of Science and Technology (*ISC*)⁷, and *Civilica* (publisher of science journals and conference proceedings)⁸ as well as using the relevant keywords in order to ensure coverage and reduce duplication.

⁴ <https://www.nlai.ir/>

⁵ <https://irandoc.ac.ir>

⁶ <https://www.magiran.com>

⁷ <https://isc.ac>

⁸ <https://civilica.com>

A comprehensive analysis of the background and the literature on research regarding Iranian kilims shows that approaches taken by scholars tend to be multidimensional. This review covers a wide range of scholarly approaches, from detailed case studies and comparative studies of Persian floor coverings to explorations of the cultural and historical contexts of Iranian kilims. Motifs in kilims have been studied until today in the academic field mainly based on two common approaches: case studies and comparative research. Case studies focus on forms of kilim or specific regions, offering in-depth insights into the distinctive qualities and cultural significance of various types of kilim. Comparative studies, on the other hand, adopt a wider perspective and investigate patterns across different kinds of kilims or compare motifs from various regions. Below is a summary of the two main types of studies, each contributing to the understanding of Iranian kilims. In the case studies, the region and characteristics of the kilim are generally introduced first, followed by a detailed examination of the kilim being studied.

Dadvar and Momenian (2006) studied the patterns and designs of Qashqai kilims, revealing the creativity, skill, and deep ideas of the weavers through motifs and patterns. These motifs help for the better understanding of religion, the worldview, myths and the foundation of customs and traditions of this tribe. The research serves to clarify the factors that promote or inhibit motifs in the history of the Qashqai. The study suggests specifically that four major and determining factors for the emergence of Qashqai kilim motifs are (a) geographical conditions and the surrounding environment, (b) the history, culture and art of Iranian nomads, (c) the socio-economic context, and (d) the levels of literacy, knowledge, income and livelihood of the people. The significant results of this study include the classification of Qashqai kilims, the most common patterns and motifs, the sizes of Qashqai kilims, the evolved or disappeared patterns and the colour structure of Qashqai kilims.

Ferasat (2009) studied the growth of handicrafts in Ilam (a Kurdish city in the Central District of Ilam Province, west of Iran) due to the local community's preference for handmade and woven fabrics. This descriptive study focused on introducing Ilam Province and its cultural customs, as well as examining woven kilims and their patterns, motifs, and designs. Of all Ilam's handicrafts, embossed kilims were the most valuable and significant artworks, made mainly by tribal women, and served as a key source of income for families. The author concludes that embossed kilims in this region were culturally and historically significant, as their patterns and motifs were derived from the ancient heritage of the region. Some of the questions raised in this article for consideration are the following: What is the most notable and considerable handicraft of Ilam? What type of a kilim is an embossed kilim? What are the characteristics of an embossed kilim that makes it significant from other handicrafts?

Izadi Jeyran (2009) examined the images and designs of hand-woven kilims within the context of traditional culture from an anthropological perspective. The focus of the study was on the patterns of Molan, a village in the Azerbaijani region of Iran, with an analysis of their form and style. In northwest Iran, especially in Azerbaijan, folk arts were of great importance to the local people and included both physical and spiritual elements of its culture, providing a deep understanding of the region's heritage. The study employed an anthropology of art framework and combined two methods with an iconographic perspective: (1) analysis of the formal features of artistic works and (2) stylistic analysis from a cross-cultural viewpoint. The research drew inspiration from Franz Boas' approach (German-American anthropologist), especially his work *Primitive Art*, to examine form, style, and the representation of meaning, with a particular focus on kilim patterns. To understand the formal representation of meaning, other forms of Azerbaijani arts, such as rock art, folk narratives, and myths, were also studied. In this research, the cross-cultural stylistic analysis includes a comparative study of shared styles between Sumerian art and Azerbaijani kilim patterns.

Shad Qazvini (2010), in her research, reviewed the motifs and visual patterns of the kilims of the Gilan region in northern Iran. She argues that these kilims are specific in terms of colour and design and, when carefully studied, provide useful information about the cultural background of the Gilan region. Gilan kilims reflect the diversity of the social structure, cultural characteristics, and uniqueness and therefore make them valuable for anthropological study. The motifs and designs are expressive manifestations of the weavers' concerns, values, and struggles, and they reflect their surroundings. In addition, the parallels between the motifs on Gilan's kilims and those of other Iranian regions suggest common historical narratives that have not been discovered. In conducting her research, Qazvini seeks to explore the rich and complex motifs found in Gilan's kilims, revealing the broader aesthetic consciousness of the region and the skill of its local artisans. Dividing the above-mentioned motifs into abstract, decorative, and figurative categories not only contributes to familiarity with the art but also their documentation and appreciation, are the keys to preserving the antique spiritual and cultural heritage of Iran.

Suri (2018) studied the Qashqai kilims and mentioned that the motifs and designs used in these kilims are tangible expressions produced by the weavers, reflecting their creative minds, subtle essence, and thoughts. The application of geometric designs, broken lines, lines of parallel, triangles, squares and other lozenges, creates a sense of proportion, a balance and perfection. Interestingly, the weavers consciously refrain from creating circular and curved forms since it is considered time-consuming compared to an inclination towards geometric orientation. This is an echo of primitive experiences within human societies, especially in nomadic and early cultural human groups. Prehistoric myths, symbolic representations and codes from these eras, motifs from the 3rd and 4th millennia B.C., mosaic builders, motifs from the Persian Empire, the Sassanid dynasty, and early Islamic period are all some of the motifs that find their origins in these motifs. The research goes on to study the features of motifs and images in Qashqai kilims and categorise and analyse them. It is a natural hypothesis that these motifs have survived through most of history, possibly stretching back to antiquity. The aim is to acknowledge and maintain this precious set of artifacts, highlighting the cultural and artistic significance of these pieces as part of Iranian tradition. This qualitative research adopts deductive and descriptive approaches and employs both data analysis and scientific critique. The results show that the motifs in the kilims feature geometric shapes, abstract patterns, and harmonious elements, as well as symbols with ritualistic, ideological, religious, and mythical meanings. These motifs are inspired by a variety of sources, including nature, architecture, metalwork, mosaics, engravings, texts, and backgrounds. Weavers draw on these inspirations, visualising them in their minds as they create their designs. The study emphasises the importance of collecting and preserving traditional motifs and how they are significant in today's art and design while serving as a source of creative inspiration. It suggests that comparative studies are needed to explore both similarities and differences to help deepen understanding. For instance, if scholars study Iranian kilims, then they frequently examine them with comparison to other textiles or cultural usages. This layered approach helps organise their distinctive features as well as provide a more straightforward examination of Iranian kilims in general.

Chitsazina *et al.* (2009) examined some differences between European tapestries and Persian kilims, with a focus on differences in design, motif, colour, texture, and the different functions given to these textiles. The study is an attempt to identify and categorise these handwoven textiles, while considering the significance of Persian kilims, in order to help improve and develop these textiles, maintaining their artistic identity. Although there are similarities in tools, materials, and weaving technologies, cultural and spiritual characteristics of Iran and Europe were emphasised in the study as factors that affect differences in terms of designs, patterns, colour compositions, sizes, and functions. Using library-based and

documentary research methods, the authors explained and emphasised both commonalities and differences in these types of textiles.

Moosavi Haji and Heiranpour (2011) examined the depiction of the goddess figure in Anatolian kilims and traced its presence in the weaving traditions of the Northern Khorasan Kurds in Iran. Many different hypotheses related to the goddess design on Anatolian kilims has led to this investigation, with some studies arguing for the presence meanwhile some refute it. It took its inspiration from James Mellaart's goddess theory and its design purpose was to analyse the goddess design in the Anatolian kilims. The research drew evidence from surviving works in Çatalhöyük for the goddess existing among Anatolian kilims. In addition, aspects of particular kilims were examined to elaborate on the goddess figures depicted on these textiles. Since the Northern Khorasan Kurds and Caucasus have historical and geographical aspects of a nearby origin towards Anatolia, the purpose of this study was to make a comparison between designs from both of the two regions.

Mohseni and Dadvar (2015) made a comparative analysis on the history of woven textiles in the history and culture of the Caucasus and Anatolia, particularly on kilims. Research conducted by their team of researchers illustrates close similarities and differences in visual components, including symbolic elements (like the snake-dragon) and geometrization in forms. This study uncovers and reflects the interrelations of visual motifs, which often spread beyond the limitations of kilims as a fabric and type of textile in which the same motif is depicted; the similarities in depicting the snake-dragon motif can probably be explained by the fact that this study focuses primarily on this course of the ethnic-cultural tradition. The study also describes how geophysical and climatic differences lead to the development of different designs and motifs. It also reveals that the snake and dragon motif, as symbols of mythology, are analysed through their representations in myths, narrative plots, symbols, and legends. The research addresses questions about the concept of snake-dragon motifs in carpet weaving, the relationships between these motifs in Caucasus and Anatolian rugs, and the causes behind their differences and similarities in kilims from these regions.

Saneyi (2015) conducted a comparative study of carpet motifs between the Shahsevan and Qashqai tribes, and also finds similarities and differences between different motifs and designs. The research analyses how the Shahsevan influence is seen in the Qashqai patterns and kilim-making, showing the shared cultural heritage and nomadic lifestyles of both groups through 16 indicators and 36 pattern samples. The researcher looked at different aspects of the motifs: natural and cultural environments, historical, folklore, legendary, and mytho-historical analyses, and the economic or social factors influencing motif development. This comparative analysis drawn on the similarities seen in qualitative and visual structures of these textiles, attributed the influence of design composition and motif simplification to the Qashqai tribe as being brought into the Shahsevan weave. It also emphasised that Shahsevan rugs are in line with nomadic traditions and cultural norms. The motifs of these ethnic groups have been greatly influenced by such factors as inter-ethnic relations, economic activity, surrounding nature, and different culture features.

Mahmudi and Shayeste Far (2018) studied the Shahsevan tribe, which mainly lives in northwestern Iran, besides the Ardabil and Dasht-e Moghan region, as well as in two other groups situated in central Iran around the region of Saveh, Garmsar, and Varamin. The Farsi word "Shasevan" translates to "the lovers of the Shah (king)." The tribe's weavings, such as kilim, were made for practical use such as saddlebags and travel bags. A wide range of ideas were expressed in their kilims, and each clan within the Shasevan confederation had its own special designs and motifs. The Turkish-speaking Shasevan are especially renowned for their skill in weaving bags, notably of the sumak variety, which is distinguished by large colourful latch hook diamonds. Their weavings have a uniquely tribal appearance, with bright, saturated colours, such as lavender, deep pink, salmon, and pastel blues, showing abstract, geometric

patterns. Dislocated to northwestern Iran from Central Asia by Persian kings in the seventeenth century, the Shasevan tribes reflect similarities with the rugs of Turkmen and other Central Asian tribes. The study explored the ancient roots of tribal weaving, underscoring the shared designs and motifs in Shasaven textiles and Caucasian kilims.

2.4.2 Overview of Previous Studies and Publications on Serbian Kilim Motifs

Regarding the Pirot kilim, one of the most significant official research studies was made in 2002 by the Ministry of Internal Economic Relations of the Republic of Serbia. This comprehensive and detailed report entitled “*Elaborate Protection of Geographical Indications of Origin*” was first compiled in 1995⁹. The report has registered 122 ornaments and 95 types of kilims with description. The kilims are named based on their primary designs such as Ogleđala, Venci, Đulovi, Bibice, Soveljća sa amajlikama, Ptice sa bibicama, Ruže sa merab, Metlice, Devojačko srce, Jerusalimska šara, Manastir Mara, Ruže u ogleđalu, Persijska kruna. This report is available for public insight under entry number 37 in the report on registered geographical indications. Pirot kilims were protected by Geographical Indication in 2002.

Velkova (2020), in her book titled *The Endless Pattern, the Pirot Kilim*, reviews the history of some Serbian motifs and discusses the distinction between Serbian motifs and other motifs. “The main body of the text can be divided into two parts. The first part of the book sets out the general characteristics of the Pirot kilim and follows its rapid development which began in the 16th century and the efforts of the Serbian government to preserve the craft in the last decades of the 19th century. Moreover, there is a section dedicated to the worldwide presence of the Pirot kilim, which is actually the best indicator of its value” (Velkova, 2020, p. 5)

Frfulanović-Šomođi *et al.* (2020) explained the Pirot kilim, its patterns that represent together with applied and decorative art, visual elements of this traditional product in contemporary fashion design. Yet, while the Pirot kilim has been compared with its local counterparts and known beyond the borders of its regional homeland, its protentional in contemporary fashion remains mostly unrealised. The study emphasise that it is widely used in local applied arts, especially in fashion, a growing concern, according to the study. The study presents the work of designers from Pirot, who are aware of local traditions and culture, as well as the whole process of their creative work. These designers have cleverly captured the traditional with modern sensibilities that work well with today’s living spaces. Notably, designers Ana Grgurović and Silvana Tošić collaborate with the local industry, which recognises the value of its traditional products. By modernising these products, they introduce them to new markets, including fashion industries, where they gain broader recognition and exposure.

Cvetković (2016), in *Two Faces- Catalog of Pirot Carpets of the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade*, reviews the history and development of kilim weaving in Pirot. The book presents a comprehensive collection of Pirot kilim samples, introducing and analysing their names and motifs. The book includes 169 kilims woven in the period from 1792 to 1932, with the most significant part consisting of those created in the first half of the 19th century, large kilims of exceptional artistic and cultural value.

Vlatković (2013, pp. 35-42) discussed the deep symbolism in the motifs and patterns on Pirot kilims. These patterns are part of a of a long-standing tradition of visual imagery in the art of telling stories about events, prayers, and daily rituals. The designs are inspired by nature, family, and spirituality and have deep meanings of protection, love, and hope. Some motifs, such as the tree of life, birds, and geometric shapes, have persisted through the ages, becoming timeless symbols that have been handed down from generation to generation. Elements of

⁹ <https://www.zis.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/G-37-Pirotski-cilim.pdf>

Eastern cultures and of Islam and Christianity are also visible in the Pirot kilims. Although these intricate works of art were woven mostly by illiterate women, conveying creativity and spirituality, the Pirot kilims are both functional and beautiful. The presence of numerous motifs and patterns in these kilims, reflects their connection to the cultural tradition of the community that has been passed down from generation to generation over centuries.

Živadinović (2022), in her book *Ornaments of Serbia: the Pirot kilim*, in four chapters has reviewed and studied the Pirot kilim and its tradition. In the first chapter, after providing a brief history of the origin and characteristics of Pirot kilim, the book discusses the methods of preparing the groundwork for kilim weaving. The second chapter, which is the biggest and main one, focuses on presenting the motifs and patterns, introducing and briefly analysing motifs in Pirot kilim. In the third section, the tradition of kilim weaving in Serbia is introduced, along with kilims found in museums and collections. Finally, the fourth chapter discuss the place of the Pirot kilim in the modern era.

2.5 Key Terminologies and Theories

Considering the fact that the subsequent sections of this thesis will be focused on semiotics, it is essential to present the primary and essential terms that are associated with this field. For the purpose of ensuring that a comprehensive understanding is achieved, these terms will be discussed and analysed in the following parts. In addition, in order to ensure that the thesis is clear and consistent throughout its entirety, specific definitions will be provided for each term. This will serve to establish a theoretical framework for the subsequent discussions in this thesis.

2.5.1 Sign and Symbol

A “symbol” is a particular type of sign where the relationship between the symbol and what it represents is based on social convention or law rather than resemblance or direct connection. According to Peirce, a symbol is a sign that refers to an object not through resemblance but by virtue of a rule or association of ideas, which causes the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object (Peirce, 1998, p. 292) . In semiotic theory, a “sign” means something that communicates meanings beyond its own self, acting as a replacement for a concept, an object or event. An observer or a user interprets this meaning, according to a culture. This is a crucial distinction as it relates to understanding semiotics. symbols are a necessary representation of abstract thoughts across cultures and because of that, symbols help abstract concepts, ideas, beliefs, traditions, and other representations be communicated in a rich way (Chandler, 2007, p. 260-262).

2.5.2 Myths and Mythology

Myths represent the collective cultural and religious values within a society, encompassing ideas, beliefs, and narratives that provide explanations for human experiences, natural phenomena, and the origins of social customs. According to Eliade (1963, p. 5), “Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of beginnings. Myth, then, is always an account of a creation; it relates how something was produced, began to be. Myth tells only of that which really happened, that which manifested itself completely. The actors in myths are supernatural beings. They are known primarily by what they did in the transcendent moments of the beginning.” In other words, myths are integral to a society’s worldview, offering holistic perspectives that reinforce shared beliefs and values. In academic fields such as sociology, anthropology, and archaeology, myths provide a

framework for understanding societal structures, cultural practices, and religious rituals. Chandler (2007, p. 143) believed that cultural myths help us to make sense of our experiences within a culture. In the framework of Barthesian cultural studies, myth, like connotation, can be seen as a higher order of signification. Hjelmslev (1961), argued that above the connotative level there was ‘a metasemiotic’ to which belonged geographical, historical, political, sociological, psychological, and religious issues relating to such concepts as “nation, region, the value forms of styles, personality, mood, etc.” (Hjelmslev 1961, 125). March (1999, p. 25) defines that “Mythology is a collection of stories or beliefs that embody the customs, values, and ideas of ancient cultures, often incorporating explanations for natural phenomena, human experiences, and cultural traditions”. According to Evans (2010, p. 7), mythology remains a piece of shareable human culture that spans across the globe, with commonalities and unique traits that can be identified and researched in a multitude of ways in and out of their initial cultural context.

2.5.3 Pattern and Motifs

A pattern is defined as “a form or model proposed for imitation; something designed or used as a model for making things; or an artistic, musical, literary, or mechanical design or form (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) ”. According to Urquhart and Wodehouse (2017), patterns, as conventionally conceived, consist of several key elements, including but not limited to repeatability, symmetry, infinite coverage of a plane, deconstruction into simple shapes or rules, colour, and symbolism. It is the repeatable nature of the forms or motifs that allows them to cover a theoretically infinite plane without gaps or the rearranging of elements, this is technically known as a “tiling” pattern. Repeating forms that may have gaps but still cover a plane are known as an “all-over” pattern. Motif, on the other hand, is a recurring concept, design, image, or theme that is consistently repeated. The word “motif” has two main meanings in art, including painting, sculpture, architecture, and carpet weaving. First, it refers to the main idea or theme of the artwork, such as landscapes, love, or destruction. Second, it describes a frequent design or visual element in the artwork that helps in the artist’s idea expression. To summarise it shortly, a pattern is made by repeatedly placing shapes or groups of shapes to occupy a specific area. This is commonly used in many artistic works, including mosaics, paintings, designs, and traditional crafts like kilims and carpets. In contrast, a motif is the central component of a pattern, which could be a single image, shape, or design. A motif may appear only once in a composition to emphasise a point or give the piece a distinctive look, or it may be repeated to establish rhythm and harmony.

2.5.4 Semiotics and Theories of Sign

Effective communication involves two fundamental steps: creating a message using signs and interpreting those signs to understand the message. By “sign” is meant a word, image, gesture, or other sign that has a meaning or message intended by the person who makes it. The sender encodes their thoughts or ideas into these signs, which is then sent to create a message. The receiver interprets or decodes the signs to understand the sender’s intended message. For communication to be successful, the sender and the receiver need to have the same understanding of the signs so that the message is correctly sent and interpreted. According to Schneider (2009), humans don’t just sense their environment through their sensory organs or comprehend it through their consciousness. They also evaluate from the standpoint of thought and explore the contexts, entities, and events around them. Moreover, they revise the acquired knowledge, arrange, summarise, evaluate, select, and apply it in real scenarios, forming a domain of verbal symbols. From the range of definitions reviewed, Eco definition stands out

as the most comprehensive, making it the focal point of reference in this research. “The sign is used to transmit information; to say or to indicate a thing that someone knows and wants others to know as well” (Eco 1988, p. 27). According to Guillemette and Cossette (2006), “Since the field of semiotics covers quite a diversity of signs, Umberto Eco has developed a classification in which he distinguishes between artificial and natural signs. Natural signs are divided into two classes: (1) signs identified with natural events or things (for example, the position of the sun); and (2) signs unintentionally produced by a human agent (for instance, a rash indicating chickenpox). This class includes several subclasses. A similar division is made for artificial signs, which are either (1) intentionally produced in order to signify (the barking of a dog, for example), or (2) intentionally produced as a primary function (for example, a chair for sitting), a secondary function (a diamond necklace for wealth), or a combined function (a police uniform, which serves both to cover and to indicate a social function)”.

In general, a sign is something objective and tangible that replaces a phenomenon that is absent and needs to be mentioned in structuralist approaches; meaning is understood through signs, and the study of signs and symbols and the way they work is called semantics. There is a difference between semiology and semiotics that needs to be noticed. “Semiology” is originally Saussure’s term and used to refer to the Saussurean tradition, whilst “semiotics” sometimes refers to the Peircean tradition, but nowadays the term semiotics is more likely to be used as an umbrella term to embrace the whole field (Nöth 1990, p. 14). According to Barthes (1967, p. 9), “semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all of these, which form the content of ritual, convention, or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification”. Semiotics, as the scientific study of signs, aims to ascertain the composition of signs and the meanings and concepts they convey. According to Fiske (1990, p. 40), Semiotics has three main areas of study:

- (1) The sign itself. This consists of the study of different varieties of signs, of the different ways they have of conveying meaning, and of the way they relate to the people who use them. For signs are human constructs and can only be understood in terms of the uses people put them to.
- (2) The codes or systems into which signs are organised. This study covers the ways that a variety of codes have developed in order to meet the needs of a society or culture, or to exploit the channels of communication available for their transmission.
- (3) The culture within which these codes and signs operate. This in turn is dependent upon the use of these codes and signs for its own existence and form.

According to Zhirenova *et al.* (2016), Kerlot (1994, as cited in Zhirenova *et al.*, 2016) points out that a symbol (or character) can be defined as: (1) an object used to represent another object in a symbolic context; (2) a group of embossed characters employed to signify a specific set of characters or objects; and (3) a unit or character belonging to a particular alphabet. Therefore, Semiotics is a discipline that deals with signs and symbols. In semiotics, the components of signs are identified. The sign is a concrete and perceptible entity that replaces an absent phenomenon. The study of semiotics extends far beyond modern times; its roots go back to antiquity. Among the pioneers who advanced the arguments that led to the formalization of semiotics as a distinct scientific and intellectual field were such eminent figures as Plato, Aristotle, the Stoic philosophers, St. Augustine, and John Locke. In 1690, the term “symbolism” was first introduced by John Locke in his work “*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*”. Despite the deep historical roots of semiotic thought, modern semiotics is based primarily on the contributions of two outstanding thinkers: the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher and logician Charles Sanders Peirce. According to Strinati (2014, p. 10) “Semiology argues that material reality can never be taken for granted. It is always constructed and made intelligible to human understanding by culturally

specific systems of meaning. This meaning is never ‘innocent’, but has some particular purpose or interest lying behind it, which semiology can uncover. Our experience of the world is never ‘innocent’ because systems of meaning make sure it is intelligible. There is no such thing as a pure, uncoded, objective experience of a real and objective world. The latter exists but its intelligibility depends upon codes of meaning or systems of signs, such as language.” Semiotic theory has had a significant impact on sociocultural anthropology during the last half of the twentieth century and into the new millennium. Semiotics provides a way to study communication focusing not only on spoken or written language but also on all kinds of communicative signals or signs. Fiske (1990) argues that the various models of meaning all share a similar structure, focusing on three essential elements that play a role in any investigation of meaning. These elements include (1) the sign, (2) the entity to which the sign points, and (3) the individuals utilising the sign. A sign is a tangible and perceptible entity that denotes something beyond itself, relying on the acknowledgment by its users that it serves as a sign. Fiske then provides an example to elaborate this model, stating that “pulling an earlobe as a signal to the auctioneer, indicating a bid. Both the auctioneer and the person making the gesture understand it as a bid, demonstrating effective communication between them” (Fiske, 1990, p. 41).

In conclusion, there are many concepts and approaches in semiotics. Eco (1976, p. 7) offers a broad definition, stating that “semiotics is about anything that can be taken as a sign”. This definition involves not only signs in the conventional sense but also words, images, sounds, gestures and objects that represent something else. It concerns how meaning is made by signs and makes a distinction between the medium of communication and the content. The way the content is interpreted depends on the person who creates it, or the audience that consumes it. Therefore, at its most basic level, Semiotics means the study of signs, their construction, communication, and reading within different contexts. It explores the ways in which signs operate as vehicles of meaning, the ways in which they are determined and coded by the cultural and social contexts in which they appear, and the ways in which subjects read and decode them.

2.5.4.1 Ferdinand de Saussure’s Sign Theory (Saussure’s Theory of Signs: Semiology)

Danesi (2006, p. 191) states that for Saussure, semiology is the study of both verbal and nonverbal signs and sign-using behavior and “Saussure thus envisioned semiology as the study of all kinds of signs in the same manner that linguistics studied verbal signs”. While Saussure’s theory is primarily associated with linguistics and structuralism, according to Hussein and Abushihab, (2014, p. 58) for Saussure, linguistics is only a part of a science (semiology) that is engaged in the study of the life of signs within society (cf. Thibault, 1997). Saussure introduced a two-part model of the sign, distinguishing between the signifier and the signified. The signifier represents the physical form of the sign, including elements like images, words, or sounds, whereas the signified refers to the underlying concept or meaning attributed to the signifier. Saussure asserted that “the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary” (Saussure, 1966, p. 67). In summary, Saussure explained that the meaning of a sign comes from how its parts, the signifier and the signified, work together. He also said that a sign’s importance is determined by how it fits into the bigger picture with other signs. So, basically, a sign is made of two things: what it looks or sounds like (signifier) and what it means (signified). Figure 11 represent the Saussure model of a sign (Chandler, 2002, p. 18).



Figure 11. Saussure’s Models of Sign

For example, in Saussure’s model of signs, the motif of three on the kilim is recognised as the signifier, while its connotation of endurance and stability represents the signified as illustrated in Figure 12.



Figure 12. Example of Saussure’s Models of Sign (Author)

In summary, Saussure suggested that the key aspect of understanding signs is to focus on how they relate to each other within a system, rather than their connection to real-world things. In simpler terms the meaning a sign has within a given system comes not from its own properties or from something it points to in the world, but from what it is not (where something it is not is another sign). Saussure was not interested in defining signs based on some essential nature but rather spoke of their meaning as being derived from all the interactions of one with another. Saussure’s work on the complex connections between language and culture had a profound influence on the field of anthropology as well. His best-known theoretical abstraction combines his understanding of culture with the notion that language embodies culture in ways that create systems governing not only how we communicate but also how we think and perceive the world around us. This viewpoint has been beneficial in examining non-western cultures, as it highlights the significance of language in embedding social practices, ethos, and cultural mindsets. It allows researchers to make sense of the ways in which various cultures use language to make sense of the world around them by understanding language as a part of cultural practices and beliefs.

2.5.4.2 Peirce’s Theory of Signs (Theory of Semiotics)

According to Silverman (1983, p. 15), Peirce’s model of the sign includes an object or referent, which does not, of course, feature directly in Saussure’s model. The representamen is similar in meaning to Saussure’s signifier, whilst the interpretant is similar in meaning to the signified. However, unlike Saussure, Peirce does not define the sign as the smallest unit of signification, and for him, anything or any phenomenon, no matter how complex, may be considered a sign from the moment it enters into a process of semiosis (Everaert-Desmedt, 2011). Therefore, the sign (in the form of a representation) for Peirce is “something which stands for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign, which it creates, I call the interpretant of the first sign. A sign stands for something; it’s an object. The object stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen” (Peirce, 1931–1966, p. 2.228). The

interaction between the representamen, the object, and the interpretant is referred to by Peirce as “semiosis” (Peirce, 1931–1966, p. 5.484). Figure 13 illustrates the Peircean model, despite Peirce himself never creating a visual representation of it. In this model, the interpretant is the understanding formed from the sign, equivalent to a sign generated by the representamen. The object is what the interpretant represents or refers to. The dashed line signifies that there may not always be a direct connection between the representamen and the object, although one could exist (Chandler, 2007, p. 30).

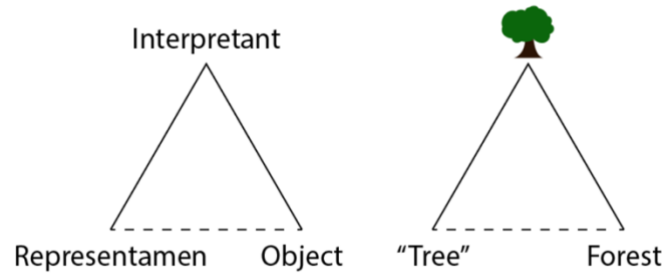


Figure 13. Peirce’s Model of Semiotics

Peirce presents various classifications and typologies of signs, according to Atkin (2023) “Peirce believed that the three elements, and the respective classifications they imposed upon signs, could be combined to give a complete list of sign types. That is, since a sign has a sign-vehicle it can be classified as either a *qualisigns*, *sinsigns*, and *legisigns*. Additionally, since that sign has an object, it can be classified as either an icon, an index, or a symbol. Finally, since that sign will also determine an interpretant it can be classified as either a *rheme*, a *dicent*, or a *delome*. Each sign is then classifiable as some combination of each of its three elements, that is, as either one of the three types of sign-vehicles, plus one of the three types of objects, plus one of the three types of interpretant.” Within these typologies, this research emphasises Peirce’s classification of signs into three categories based on their relationship with the signified or the object. As Chandler (2007) highlights, Peirce categorised signs into symbolic, iconic, and indexical types as follows:

- (1) *Symbolic signs*: In this type, the signifier does not resemble the signified, but the relationship between them is entirely arbitrary or convention-based, requiring learning. Examples include language (specific languages, alphabetical letters, punctuation marks, words, phrases, and sentences), numbers, Morse code, traffic lights, and national flags.
- (2) *Iconic signs*: Here, the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified, sharing some of its qualities in a recognizable manner, such as in portraits, cartoons, scale models, onomatopoeia, metaphors, realistic sounds in program music, sound effects in radio drama, dubbed film soundtracks, and imitative gestures.
- (3) *Indexical signs*: In this type, the signifier is not arbitrary but has a direct connection, either physically or causally, to the signified, which can be observed or inferred. Examples include natural signs like smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odours, and flavours; medical symptoms like pain, a rash, or pulse rate; measuring instruments like a weathercock, thermometer, or clock; signals like a knock on a door or a phone ringing; pointers like a pointing finger or a directional signpost; recordings like a photograph, film, video, or television shot, an audio-recorded voice; personal trademarks like handwriting or catchphrases; and indexical words such as “that,” “this,” “here,” and

“there” According to this classification, kilim motifs can fall into the categories of both iconic and symbolic signs (Chandler, 2007, pp. 36-37).

2.5.4.3 Barthes’s Theory of Signs (Theory of Semiotics)

Roland Barthes is well known for “the system of signification” and mainly the study of signs within cultural context. According to Arackal (2015, p. 3), semiotics began to become a major approach to cultural studies in the late 1960s, influenced in part by Roland Barthes’ contributions. Barthes (1967, p. 9) describes semiology as the study of any system of signs, including images, gestures, sounds, objects, and their combinations, which create meaning in rituals, conventions, or public entertainment. According to Sui and Fan (2005, p. 59) “for Barthes, the culmination of meaning created by signifier plus signified is more than just a system of random naming or nomenclature. It is subject to a rich layering of meaning according to each country’s cultures.” Therefore, for Barthes, the relationship between the signifier and signified is crucially defined through the concepts of denotation and connotation. He distinguishes between two types of signified: the denotative and the connotative, emphasising that meaning encompasses both aspects (Chandler, 2007, 138). Barthes introduced the “Order of Signification” as a system for creating multilevel meaning and this model is consist of and *denotation* and *connotation*. Denotation is the most basic, literal level of meaning, the objective, straightforward description of what is seen or read. It represents the superficial and surface-level interpretation, regardless of cultural or individual context. Connotation, on the other hand, deals with the deeper, more subjective layer of meaning. Cultural, emotional, and ideological associations guide the way it is shaped and interpreted beyond its literal interpretation. These meanings are influenced by the viewer’s or reader’s experiences, cultural background, and societal norms. Connotation allows for the creation of symbolic or metaphorical layers, adding richness and complexity to the text or image. Together, these levels show that meaning is dynamic and multi-layered. A single sign can convey both a literal and a culturally nuanced message, enabling texts and media to resonate uniquely with individuals while maintaining a shared base meaning. This framework is essential for analysing how messages are constructed and interpreted, revealing the implicit ideologies and cultural assumptions within media and communication. According to Chandler (2007, p. 137), “the relationship between the signifier and signified relation is described by denotation and connotation terms, and an analytic distinction is made between two types of signified, a denotative signified and a connotative signified. Meaning includes both denotative and connotative.”

Denotation is the first order of signification, which refers to the simple or literal relationship of a sign to its reference, i.e., signifier and signified. On the other hand, denotation meaning is more complex, and according to Fiske (1990, p. 86), it is “the interaction that occurs when the sign meets the feelings or emotions of their users and the values of their culture.”. Therefore, connotation represents the second level of the semiotic system, influenced by cultural factors. Barthes’ concept of two-stage meaning is illustrated in Figure 14.

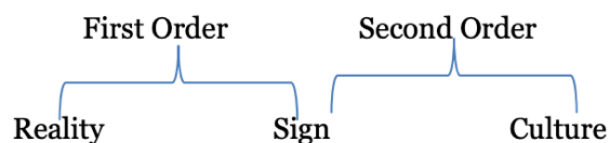


Figure 14. Two Sign Orders by Barthes

Additionally, the third order of signification, as described by O’Sullivan *et al.* (1994), relates to what Barthes termed as *myth*, which is closely associated with connotation. Barthes argued that myths represented the dominant ideologies of our era. He posited that denotation and connotation, as the realms of signification, blend together to give rise to ideology, a concept which, although not explicitly stated by Barthes, has been recognised as a third level of signification (O’Sullivan *et al.*, 1994, p. 287). Sari *et al.* (2022, p. 201) indicate that for Barthes, *myth* is a way for humans to conceptualise or understand something in their minds. It is a reflection of their culture.

According to Fitriani (2023, p. 42), Barthes created a systematic model of myth in analysing signs into ideas in two stages; the significance of the first stage is the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In a sign, there is an external reality. The markers represent the elements of form and content, while the signifiers represent the elements of the concept or meaning. The unity between the markers is what is referred to as a sign. The significance in the second stage relates to content, a sign of working through the content, and this emotion has the connotation of a particular ideology. In summary, based on Barthes’ concept, semiotics analyses the meaning of a sign that consists of a system of denotative, connotative, and meta-language or mythic meanings, which is generally Barthes’ concept of two orders of signification as depicted in Figure 15 (Fiske, 1990, p. 88).

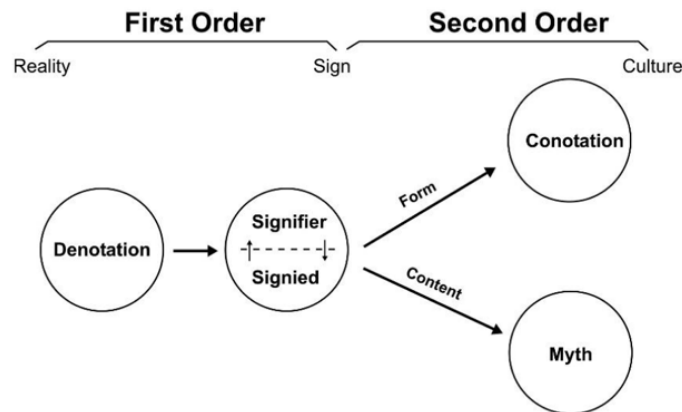


Figure 15. Barthes’ Concept of Two-stage Meaning

2.5.4.4 Lotman’s Theory of Signs (Theory of Semiotics)

Among theories concerning semiotics, the one addressing semiotics and culture is the theory discussed and developed by Yuri Lotman (1922-1993), which clearly demonstrates the influence of linguistics, constructivism, and post-structuralism. Lotman is well-known as the pioneer in addressing the semiotics of culture, although he is not alone in this effort. During the 1970s and 1980s, semiotic reflections on culture by Roland Barthes, Greimas, and Eco also hold relevance. According to Shukman (1977, p. 179), Semiotics is for Lotman the recognition of the fact that communication and information-processing are a primary fact of human culture, and that no study of human culture can be undertaken except on the basis of such a recognition.”

Based on Tamm (2019, p. 6) Lotman’s cultural semiotics proceeds from the basic premise that culture and semiotics are essentially coextensive phenomena, culture is by nature semiotic, and semiotics evolves in a cultural environment. Generally, Mihhail Lotman believes that semiotics is primarily the semiotics of culture, and the source for other branches of semiotics (Lotman, M. 2013, p. 262). Therefore, the concept of “cultural semiotics,” is believed to have been introduced into scholarly discourse by Juri Lotman. According to Borooh (2018, p. 212), “The term cultural semiotics, which was (most likely) introduced into the literature by Yuri Lotman, refers to research using the methodology of the so-called Tartu-Moscow school.

Lotman's cultural semiotics is a holistic approach, examining the principles of "cultural objects" in their "cultural environment," which Lotman calls the *semiosphere*."

It should be noted that according to Lotman, culture is defined as "the totality of non-hereditary information acquired, preserved, and transmitted by the various groups of human society" (Lotman, 1977a [1967], p. 213), and "cultural objects" encompass a diverse range of topics, including customs and rituals, painting, cooking, and religion. Lotman (2004a, p. 396) believed that "Culture should primarily be understood as a semiotic mechanism, it is a sign system that is organised in a certain manner (i. e. a language). Such an approach makes it possible to apply to the analysis of culture those categories that have already proven themselves useful in general semiotics (code and message, text and structure, langue and parole, paradigmatic and syntagmatic description, etc.)." Lotman's extensive exploration of culture led to the development of a typology of cultures, published in *Studies in the Typology of Culture* (1970), marking a distinct aspect of his contributions to the field. According to Salupere (2022, p. 59) "One central concept in Lotman's semiotics of culture is cultural typologies, the objective of which is to describe the basic types of cultural codes, to define the universals of human culture, and to create "a grammar of culture", i.e., a unified system of the general structure of the universal characteristics of the "culture of humankind".

In summary, the cultural theory of Yuri Lotman aims to describe and explain the mechanisms of semiosis or the sign process in any culture. For Lotman, culture is a cohesive and structural mechanism that is defined in contrast to non-culture. From Lotman's point of view, culture is both a semiotic system that includes other semiotic systems or secondary modelling systems based on natural language (primary modelling systems). In other words, the textuality of culture is the mechanism that determines and regulates cultural behaviour, and the text acts as the memory of culture. The semiosphere, on the other hand, is the space that encompasses the relationships between texts and offers the possibility of semiosis or meaning-making. The semiosphere is not only the sum of semiotic systems, but also a necessary condition for the functioning of language and culture.

2.5.5 Semiotic Anthropology

According to Mertz (2007, p. 338) and Borocho (2018), the term semiotic anthropology was used by Singer in 1978 in his paper "For a Semiotic Anthropology" (Singer 1978, p. 202-231) to demarcate an analytic approach based on renewed anthropological attention to the work of Charles Sanders Peirce; however, the main theses of his proposal were developed in 1984 in *Glassy Essence* (Singer 1984). Although Singer is mainly considered the one who urged the use of the label "semiotic anthropology", according to Ness and Coleman (2022, p. 41), other scholars and anthropologists also made significant contributions to this field of study, including distinguished figures in semiotics and linguistic anthropology such as Clifford Geertz, James Boon, Thomas A. Sebeok, Michael Silverstein, Melford Spiro, and M.N. Srinivas (1984: xiii). As the concepts within Singer's approach evolved, leading anthropologists focusing on art and ritual such as Roy Rappaport (1979), Stanley Tambiah (1979), and Nancy Munn (1973) explored different aspects of Peirce's pragmatic theory of signs (Pelkey, Petrilli, & Ricciardone, 2023). These theoretical pursuits were propelled even further in 1994 when Richard J. Parmentier published "Signs and Society," becoming the next catalyst to spur renewed attention to semiotic anthropology. Parmentier did not directly mention Singer's proposal but pointed out that there exists the possibility of integrating semiotic methods in ethnographic work, especially with an aim to Symbolise the specific features and objects that belong to each kind of culture (Borocho, 2018, p. 215).

Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942) was another influential scholar in this area. He opened the way for the idea of a synthetic study of culture, leading in particular to the

combination of anthropology and semiotics as a universal study. In his book “*A Scientific Theory of Culture*” (1944), Malinowski took culture studies seriously and criticised scholars who called it unscientific. According to Torop (2006, p. 304), in his functional analysis of culture, Malinowski identified three dimensions of the cultural process: artifacts, organised groups or human social relations, and symbolism or symbolic acts. Based on these principles, Malinowski emphasised the importance of studying everything in culture within its context and in terms of its function. Malinowski’s approach underscores the ongoing importance of maintaining awareness of the relationship between a discipline and its subject matter, as he stated, “Our minimum definition implies that the first task of each science is to recognise its legitimate subject matter. It must proceed to methods of true identification or isolation of the relevant factors of its process” (Malinowski 1944, p. 14).

The development and foundational principles of semiotic anthropology can be traced back to four theories introduced in sub-sections in 2.5.4. These theories position the concepts of Peirce and de Saussure within the initial generation of semiotic anthropology. The subsequent generation expanded this paradigm by incorporating Lotman’s semiotics of culture and Barthes’s semiology, particularly concerning mythologies. The third generation represents the idealised semiotic anthropology, the framework of which should be established based on the theoretical underpinnings of the preceding two semiotics. Based on the model proposed by Boroch (2018, p. 217), the development of semiotic anthropology is illustrated in Figure 16 .

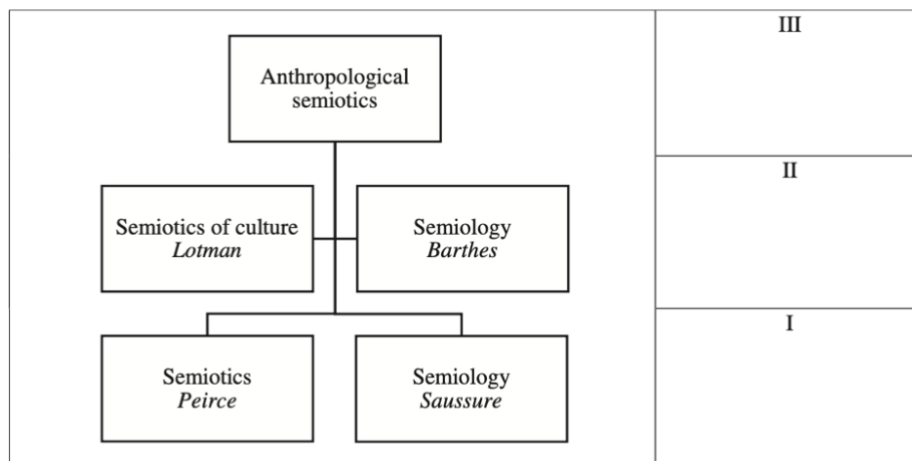


Figure 16. Development of Semiotic Anthropology

Boroch (2018, p. 219) considers semiotic anthropology as a “research program” with three main goals: “The first is the establishment of a “cultural theory of signs” as a hypostatic object functioning in higher-order ontologies. The second is the reduction of the paradigms of research on culture to one, merging philosophical-philological and anthropological-ethnographic perspectives in order to unify methodology and specialised research techniques. The third goal is the development of an effective analytical tool for cultural messages such as architecture, painting, eating habits, or fashion, which constitute material reflections of the systems of values of a certain community.”

In summary, semiotic anthropology is an interdisciplinary field of research that combines anthropology the study of culture sociology society and human behaviour and semiotics study of signs, symbols and sign processes. This post-structuralist perspective focuses on the generation, conveyance, and interpretation of meaning through signs and symbols, specifically in particular socio-cultural contexts. It looks to discover how societies use signs and symbols to understand the world around them, share information, and build social worlds.

This thesis employs semiotic anthropology as the primary theoretical framework to study and analyse the semantic system of motifs in kilims of Iran and Serbia. Such analysis focus on the common or different elements of culture, identity, and social actualities illustrated in kilims of these two areas. The connection is even more significant when it comes to the connection between art and anthropology. An anthropologically relevant definition of art, in the words of Morphy (1994, p. 655), is “objects having semantic and/or aesthetic properties that are used for presentational or representational purposes.” Consequently, using semiotic anthropology as a theoretical framework, both the semantic, aesthetic, and socio-cultural aspects of motifs are considered in the research.

2.6 Conclusion of Chapter 2

This chapter provides a thorough review of the research literature organised into five subsections. The initial part of the chapter focuses on into the significance of kilim weaving both historically and culturally, detailing the places in which it has been practiced along with its function in these regions. The second part is devoted to kilim weaving traditions in Iran and Serbia and closely describes the regions where these textiles are woven.

The third section is the literature review, which explores previous research on kilim and motif analysis within Iran and Serbia. This section highlights the main contributions and findings of previous research, helping to better understand the study of kilim motifs and their meanings in these cultural contexts. The fourth section provides a brief overview of terminology and theoretical concepts used in this study, explaining the semiotic theories in detail. These theories provide a framework for the classification and analysis of kilim motifs, which will be explained in the third chapter. The final section introduces and discusses the primary theoretical framework (semiotic anthropology) for this research and finally explains its relevance. Kilim motifs and patterns are more than just decorative designs; they highlight the cultural tradition of communities. Through the lens of semiotic anthropology, this research explores kilims as semiotic resources, interpreting motifs as communal representations and analysing beliefs, traditions, and cultural heritages within Iranian and Serbian societies.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY (RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODS)

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology adopted in this research. It explains the research approach chosen and outlines the steps taken to build the database of kilim motifs as well as establishing the criteria for data collection and annotation. Additionally, this chapter introduces the schema and tagset used for motif annotation, facilitating a structured and systematic approach to analysis.

3.1 Introduction

Every scientific study requires a carefully selected approach that matches its subject matter and objectives to ensure reliable and meaningful outcomes. Methodology is like a roadmap designed to inform the researcher how a research statement can be validated, tested, or refuted. It describes a systematic approach outlining the steps required to accomplish the objectives of the research, which may involve answering research questions or evaluating hypotheses. Thus, selecting an appropriate methodology and maintaining consistency throughout the research process are fundamental principles of the scientific method and a key determinant of the research outcome. In the present thesis, according to the theoretical framework of the research, a combined *Analytical-descriptive Methodology* is employed to conduct a comparative analysis of kilim motifs from Iran and Serbia. This methodology is selected to enable a comprehensive examination of the motifs, considering not only their visual and structural properties but also their cultural, historical, and semiotic contexts. Applying the analytical-descriptive method, the researcher can describe the motifs of the two regions, compare their similarities and differences, and analyse the importance and cultural contexts of the motifs in the two regions. To achieve this, data is collected from multiple sources to better understand and cover the subject. Most of these references come from literature, ranging from academic books and journal articles to research reports and various other types of scholarly literature, which served to provide theoretical and contextual grounding to the study. Additionally, direct observation of the kilims and motifs from each region was conducted to better understand and become familiar with their cultural significance. This combination of literature-based research and direct observation allowed for a more accurate and detailed analysis of the kilim motifs. This chapter explains the research design and the methodology of the study, explaining how the study was planned and implemented. Hence, it has covered research questions and hypotheses, followed by a discussion of its methodologies in depth to explain the precise steps, tools, and techniques used in the study. This detailed explanation ensures transparency and provides a clear understanding of how the research was conducted.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

This research is primarily focused on cultural studies and employs the semiotic-anthropological approach as its theoretical framework to study kilim motifs, meanings, and their cultural expressions in Iran and Serbia. This thesis employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies for a broader, comprehensive, and multidimensional analysis. The primary aim of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis to examine the motifs and patterns in Iranian and Serbian kilims to identify both similarities and differences and connections. This objective underlines the importance of understanding how cultural symbols and artistic traditions are practiced and preserved through kilim weaving in these two distinct yet interconnected cultural regions. Additionally, the research seeks to explore the application of semiotics in analysing how cultures communicate concepts, values, and identities through kilim motifs. By analysing and comparing the motifs, this study intends to reveal the cultural, artistic, and anthropological messages hidden in kilims from two different geographies. The following research questions and hypotheses are based on the research objectives. These questions outline the study direction, focusing its semiotic and cultural investigation of kilim motifs within the Iranian and Serbian contexts.

Question 1. What are the common motifs, symbols, and patterns used in Iranian and Serbian kilims?

Hypothesis: It is expected that because of the historical and cultural exchange that most likely occurred from Central Asia to Anatolia and between the two regions, there will be a similarities in motifs and symbols in Iranian and Serbian kilims, but at the same time there will exist motifs that are not common to both regions, thus displaying their own cultural identity. Although the motifs and patterns found in Iranian and Serbian kilims are likely to reflect aspects of their respective cultures, historical background, and regional specifications, a common motif exclusive to both Iranian and Serbian kilims is expected to derive from nature (plants and animals) and geometric patterns. Moreover, some common motifs could be inspired by historical contacts or the trade to these two regions.

Question 2. How do the motifs, patterns, and symbols in Iranian and Serbian kilims convey cultural, social, and individual expressions?

Hypothesis: It is assumed that the motifs, patterns, and symbols in the kilims of each region represent the visual representation of artistic, cultural values, and mythological beliefs. A hypothesis that can be proposed is that motifs convey meaning within their cultural and geographical contexts, essentially reflecting aspects of the cultural environment and preserving cultural identities, reflecting social structures and transferring individual experiences in the respective societies.

Question 3. What are the similarities and differences in the motifs of Iranian and Serbian kilims, and how do they reflect broader cultural interactions and influences?

Hypothesis: It is assumed that the Anatolian region played a key role in transferring motifs to the Balkans, and impacted the tradition of kilim weaving in Serbia. Considering the shared symbols and motifs between Iran and Anatolia, it is likely that similarities exist between the motifs of Iran and Serbia. However, differences in climate (Iran's semi-arid and desert landscape but Serbia has green nature), as well as cultural, religious, and social factors (with most kilim weavers in Iran being nomadic, while in Serbia they are based in urban and rural region of Pirot), can lead to the formation of motifs specific to each region that reflect differences.

Question 4. How can a semiotic-anthropological approach illuminate the layers of meaning and cultural significance embedded in kilim designs from both regions?

Hypothesis: It is assumed that employing the semiotic anthropological approach will enable the identification of layers of meaning related to culture and its social function, especially concerning myths deeply rooted in the culture and directly connected with social life. It is anticipated that this approach, through the examination of hidden layers of meaning in the myths of both countries, as well as the signs formed within human society related to each culture, will aid in providing a more accurate interpretation and analysis of the motifs. This will demonstrate how kilim motifs function as a visual language, conveying cultural, historical, mythological, and social narratives, as well as reflecting the group and personal identities of communities

Based on the above hypotheses, this study is a type of applied research regarding the objectives and descriptive-analytical in terms of methodology, including both library and field research. Library research involves the process of collecting information, data, and insights

from books, articles, encyclopedias, or any other resources available in libraries or online databases. Field research, on the other hand, involves firsthand viewing of, or contact with, kilims in certain areas. In summary, this thesis adopts a semiotic-anthropological approach and employs a comprehensive descriptive and analytical methodology. It combines both quantitative and qualitative research methods to compare motifs and patterns on Iranian and Serbian kilims. The methodology is chosen to deeply explore and study the motifs within their cultural and traditional contexts. The research is conducted in three main phases:

- (1) Collecting data and creating a kilim motif database,
- (2) Developing an annotation model for the motifs,
- (3) Conducting statistical, analytical, and comparative analyses to interpret the data.

Each of these phases is divided into specific stages to ensure a thorough and methodical exploration of the topic, as follows:

3.2.1 Phase (1) Collecting Data and Creating a Kilim Motif Database

This phase consists of three stages:

- (1) *Data Collection*: Choosing motifs from Iranian and Serbian kilims.
- (2) *Defining Standards for Motif Annotation*: Defining specific standards for motif labeling to provide consistency, as there is a large variety of forms motifs may take.
- (3) *Setting Up the Kilim Database*: Creating a database (through Microsoft Excel) to organise and manage the collected data according to the established standards for the kilim motifs collection.

3.2.2 Phase (2) Developing the Annotation Model

This phase of the research includes three interconnected stages to create a systematic framework for analysing and interpreting kilim motifs:

Stage (1) Introducing a Semiotic Theory: The connotation model of Roland Barthes is used as the main theoretical framework to analyse the kilim motifs for their deeper meanings. Using Barthes' framework, the study moves beyond the surface-level denotation of motifs to consider their cultural, symbolic, and emotional connotations. This semiotic approach offers an analytical framework in which the deeper meanings of the motifs emerge from the background of their cultural-historical context.

Stage (2) Developing a Scheme for Motif Annotation: In the second stage, an effort is made to create a complete taxonomy and develop a system for kilim motif classification. This taxonomy is created at three layers of hierarchy:

Layer (1): Motif Name: Identifying and naming each motif according to the name they are normally called or referred to.

Layer (2) Motif Type: Organising motifs by their structural or visual characteristics into higher-level categories broad enough to encompass a range of motifs (e.g., geometric, floral, or figurative)

Layer (3) Connotation: Recording the symbolic or cultural connotation of each motif, as determined through semiotic analysis.

Stage (3) Creating a Tagset for Motif Annotation: Based on the annotation scheme, this stage involves developing a Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT), a detailed system for

categorising and annotating motifs. To ensure nuanced and thorough analyses, the KMT organises motifs according to several parameters as follows:

- (1) *Motif ID*: A unique code to identify each tagged motif.
- (2) *Motif Source*: The source from which the motif is taken.
- (3) *Motif Region*: The specific region the kilim or motif belong to.
- (4) *Motif Placement*: Marks motif in the margin or the body of the kilim.
- (5) *Motif Type*: A classification based on form and structure of the motif
- (6) *Motif Name*: The traditional or typical recognised name for the motif.
- (7) *Connotative Meaning*: The deeper cultural or symbolic meaning of the motif.

The designed tagset can provide structured frameworks for motif analysis, allowing motifs to be identified, compared, and interpreted across distinct cultures. Overall, these three stages in the phase 2 provide a solid foundation for a detailed and organised analysis of kilim motifs, combining semiotic theory with practical classification and analysis tools.

3.2.3 Phase (3) Conducting Data Analyses and Interpretation

This research phase has three clear and interacting steps for analysing data, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of kilim motifs within Iranian and Serbian culture and traditions:

- (1) **Quantitative Analysis**: This analysis involves performing statistics to interpret the data obtained from the Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT). Using quantitative methods, the study can look at how often certain motifs show up in each category and how common they are in different regions.
- (2) **Qualitative Analysis**: This analysis uses cultural semiotics and semiotic theory to look at how the patterns in Iranian and Serbian kilims are alike and different. It reviews the cultural, historical, and symbolic contexts of the motifs through qualitative analysis to uncover their deeper meanings and connotations. This method reveals how kilim motifs express each culture's values, ideas, and artistic traditions.
- (3) **Comparative Analysis**: This analysis uses statistical data as well as the tagset information to compare kilim motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims. Comparative analysis examines differences in motif placement, types, and themes, showing how each culture expresses its identity and history through kilim designs.

Phases 1 and 2, which are about the development of the theoretical framework, motif annotation scheme, and the development of the motif tagset, are fully introduced and described in this section. Phase 3, the application of these tools to more detailed data analysis, will be extensively introduced in chapter 4, where the results and their interpretations will be elaborated. This structure guides the study from theory to analysis, allowing a complete examination of the research subject.

3.3 Data Collection, Sampling and the Database

It should also be noted that the term “data” in this research covers only patterns or motifs present on the woven kilims related to two geographical regions, Iran and Serbia, which form the statistical population of the study. The unit of study is an individual kilim piece, while the unit of analysis is each motif extracted from these kilims. Data, i.e., kilim motifs, was collected using: (1) Library sources: Kilim catalogues, books, articles, and visual documents have been reviewed to collect information and motifs of kilims belonging to both regions. (2) Fieldwork: First-hand observations were conducted by visiting kilim-weaving regions in Iran and Serbia, interviewing weavers and experts, and documenting kilims through photography and detailed

notes. And (3) Internet resources: Relevant online databases and digital archives were collected to supplement the data. Given the extensive diversity of motifs and the restricted availability of certain resources, the research concentrated on a carefully chosen group of motifs gathered from the sources mentioned above. The collection includes a period of approximately one hundred years, covering both traditional and contemporary designs.

Due to the wide variety of kilims, especially the different regions within Iran, where kilim is woven in various areas as explained in 2.3.1, the sample size had to be constrained. Two hundred unique kilims (100 from Iran and 100 from Serbia) were analysed. a total of unique 80 types of motifs were identified throughout the entire corpus. From each kilim, maximum five motifs were selected, resulting in a database of 828 motifs, which forms the core of the analysis. Each motif is a unit of analysis and is grouped by the design, placement, and connotative meaning, as described in Table 1. However, because of the wide variety of kilims in both regions and the difficulty of accessing all samples, the research samples were selected randomly and were available in the Persian and Serbian catalogues, books or other resources. This could guarantee diverse sampling of motifs while remaining within the practical limits of the study. Additionally, the random selection minimised potential bias, providing an objective basis for comparative analysis.

Table 1. Size of the Database (Research Corpus)

| No. | Unit | Total items |
|-----|--------------|-------------|
| 1 | Kilim Pieces | 200 |
| 2 | Total Motifs | 80 |
| 3 | Motif Tags | 828 |

3.3.1 Defining Standards for Motif Labelling

In order to obtain a reliable motif labelling, a number of clear criteria need to be defined since a great diversity of motif forms exists. This is crucial because consistency and clarity in motif identification and categorisation are critical. It should be noted that most weaving of kilims, particularly in tribal and nomadic communities, is done without following a pattern, relying instead on a mental image. As a result, the designs, patterns, and motifs of kilims tend to have different shapes, sizes, and colours. Therefore, the following standards have been set for identifying, distinguishing, categorising, and tagging motifs:

- (1) *Variations in Shapes:* A motif may vary in shape and form due to the different weaving techniques used. This diversity has been carefully considered during the tagging process to ensure accurate identification. Therefore, if the basic form of a motif remained the same with a few variations or differences, it was classified accordingly.
- (2) *Variations in Size and Positioning of Motifs:* The kilims show a lot of variation in the size and position of the motifs. While these differences may affect the interpretation of a kilim as a whole, it should be emphasised that this study specifically focuses on the analysis of motifs. Therefore, the size and placement of motifs did not influence motif selection and classification.
- (3) *Variations in Colours:* Identifying and recognising colour variances within motifs is not essential when tagging them. Although recording the colour differences makes it

easier to apply tags to motifs based on their appearance and aesthetic qualities, the colour itself should not impact the selection and tagging of the motif.

- (4) *Geographical Origins*: Due to the diversity and extensive geographical distribution of weaving locations, especially in Iran, motifs are observed in various forms and names. Therefore, in categorising and labeling motifs, no attention was paid to the place of production and originality.
- (5) *Complex Motifs and Patterns*: If motifs are part of a complex background or motif that is not identifiable or is also unreadable as a specific form of motif or has overlapping details, then these motifs are categorised as unspecified. In other words, only clearly defined and recognizable motifs have been classified, whereas motifs and patterns in complex designs have not been categorised to prevent misidentification.

3.3.2 Setting Up the Kilim Motif Database

The next step after establishing the standards and the instructions for identifying kilim motifs was to use Microsoft Excel as the primary software tool for database creation. This software was chosen due to its successful handling of varying dataset sizes with efficiency and its suitability to obtaining information according to the proposed annotation model. Microsoft Excel is user-friendly and it enables the researcher to structure the database according to the predetermined parameters (motif regions, locations, and types and connotations). These characteristics assist in structuring and visualising the data for simpler analysis. These capabilities ensure that the data is well-organised and easily accessible for analysis. The software's filtering and search functionalities help to better search for queries as required in the dataset. Another significant advantage of Microsoft Excel is its capacity to generate detailed and customizable reports from the stored data. These features are essential to facilitate a systematic analysis in later phases of the research, allowing for comparisons, summaries, and visualization of main findings. These features create a practical part of Microsoft Excel that allows convenient use in research.

3.4 Developing a Model for Motif Annotation

Following the initial phases of collecting sample kilim motifs and setting up the database, the next phase focuses on establishing the annotation model for kilim motifs. This process is carried out in two systematic parts: first, the annotation of the motif forms, and second, the annotation related to the motif's meaning. Each section explores a different aspect of the motifs to provide a better understanding of their visual and cultural significance. A description of each part is given as follows:

- (1) *Annotation Related to the Form of Motif*: This annotation targets the visual and structural characteristics of the motifs. This includes categorising motifs based on their geometric forms, identifying common design patterns, and analysing their placement within the kilim composition. Through this documentation of these formal features, the research provides a basis for understanding the aesthetic and technical features of the motifs.
- (2) *Annotation Related to the Meaning of the Motif*: This part examines the meanings of the motifs, focusing on their symbolic and cultural significance. Using semiotic analysis, these motifs have been annotated for their potential meanings, which might

be cultural, historical, or anthropological. This is the key step in recognising the deeper meanings behind the motifs and connecting them to their covert cultural contexts. The overview of the process steps and annotations for each part of the process is shown in Table 2, which defines the methodology and the criteria through which the kilim motifs were systematically classified and analysed.

Table 2. The Annotation Process of Kilim Samples

| Stage | Annotation Category | Description |
|-------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Related to the Form of Motif | Annotating the Motif ID |
| 2 | | Annotating the Originalities |
| 3 | | Annotating the Placements |
| 4 | | Annotating the Types |
| 5 | | Annotating the Motifs |
| 6 | Related to the Meaning of the Motif | Annotating the Connotative Meaning |
| 7 | | Classification of the Thematic Domains |

3.4.1 Scheme of Motif Annotation

The primary criterion for determining the annotation model is the establishment of a theoretical framework of semiotics that allows for the interpretation and meaning of motifs. For this purpose, Barthes' semiotic theory was chosen as the framework for motif annotation. This theory, as outlined by Allen (2003, p. 42), emphasises the concept of the sign, which represents the relationship between the signifier and the signified. For example, in this framework, a motif like "scorpion" functions as the signifier or denotation, representing an animal, while the underlying concept or symbolic meaning, such as protection, serves as the signified or connotation. As already mentioned, Barthes expands on this concept by introducing a "second-order system", or connotation, where the sign from the initial acts as the signifier for another sign. As noted by Fiske (1990, p. 86), Barthes identifies connotation as one of the three ways in which signs function within the second order of signification. Bouzida (2015, p. 4) also indicates that Barthes suggested the term connotation to explain the way in which signs work and is influenced by the subjective factors and the values of the user's culture. For Barthes, "connotation being itself a system comprises signifier, signified and the process which unites the former to the latter (signification)". Connotation refers to the multiplicity of the meaning, it is the reproduction of meaning which is built on denotation, therefore "connotation relies upon the prior existence of denotation, it always works in the borrowed territory of the denoted" (Jamieson 2007, p. 43). This explanation clarifies that, in the previous example, the connotation of "scorpion" is protection against "danger and malevolent forces". This process, known as "signification," establishes the foundation for examining visual materials such as motifs on kilims. To classify, annotate, and analyse the motifs in the selected samples of this research, the annotation process was conducted through the following sequential stages:

3.4.1.1 Stage (1) Annotating the Motifs ID

Each motif is designated a unique ID code, called the "Motif ID," to enable easy identification and classification of each kilim in the database. The "Motif ID" includes key information to identify each motif and gives you information about country, region, catalog source and page number of motifs documented. For example:

- <Ir_AZ_K102>: This ID represents an Iranian motif from **Iran**, the **Azerbaijan** region, documented in the **Kilims in Iran** book (marked by 'K') on **page 102**.

- **<Sr_PI_D98>**: This ID represents a motif from **Serbia**, from the **Pirot** region, documented in the **D catalog** (marked by ‘D’) on **page 98**.

This annotation system, referred to as “Motif ID” in the database, helps uniquely identify and track each motif. This allows researchers to easily determine a motif’s origin, region, and source, as well as to compare or search within the database. Overall, a unique ID is essential for maintaining clarity and accuracy in the classification and analysis of kilim motifs

3.4.1.2 Stage (2) Annotating the Originality of the Kilim Samples

The initial step in annotation is to identify the geographic region of the kilim from which the motif was collected in the selected samples. Due to the widespread production of kilims in Iran, this annotation also specifies the regions and ethnic groups associated with kilim production, covering five main areas: Qashqai tribes (Turks), Bakhtiari tribes (Lors), Khorasan province (Kurds), Azerbaijan province (Turks), and Kordestan province (Kurds). In Serbia, however, samples have been collected exclusively from the Pirot region. This regional categorisation is referred to as “Motif Regions” in the database and serves as a foundational layer in the annotation process. By associating each motif with its specific geographic and cultural origin, the research provides a contextualized framework for analysing and comparing kilim motifs from Iran and Serbia.

3.4.1.3 Stage (3) Annotating the Placement of Motifs

In kilim design, two main parts are typically distinguished: the body or centre of the kilim and the border or margin. Motifs are present in both sections. However, since the primary significance lies in interpreting the motifs within the body of the kilim first and then the margin, each section’s motifs are annotated separately. Therefore, when annotating the placement of motifs, it is specified whether they belong to the body or the margin of a kilim. On the other hand, since an integrated semantic system of border and central motifs can be found in some kilims, it is crucial to carefully consider the placement of these motifs. This annotation is referred to as “Motif Placement” in the database.

3.4.1.5 Stage (4) Annotating Types of Motifs

In terms of design and visual characteristics, the motifs used on the kilims are categorised and annotated in four types, which include:

- (1) Motifs related to humans and body parts (Human-Representative Motifs): This type of motif includes human figures and specific parts of the body like hands, feet, or faces.
- (2) Motifs related to animals (Animal-Representative Motifs): This group represents motifs of various animals, real or mythical.
- (3) Motifs related to plants and trees (Plant-Representative Motifs): Motifs in this group show botanical elements such as flowers, leaves, or trees.
- (4) Geometric and abstract motifs: These types of motifs, which are the most common and frequent, are characterised by geometric shapes, abstract forms, and repetitive forms.

The formalistic classification of motifs into these four types can be observed in some previous research and studies related to kilim motifs, as mentioned in section 2.4.1. Therefore,

each motif is classified into the subcategory corresponding to its motif type. This annotation is referred to as “Motif Types” in the database.

3.4.1.6 Stage (5) Annotating the Motifs






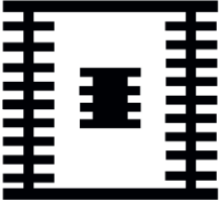

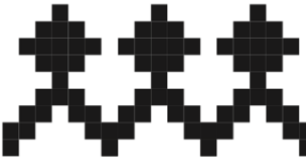
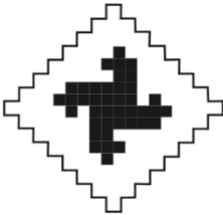
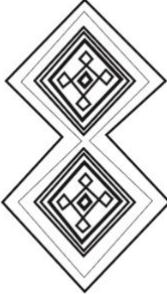
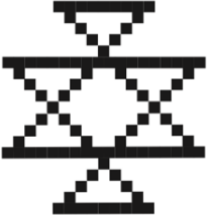
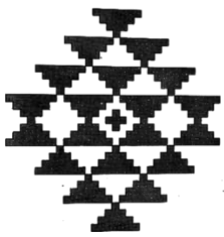







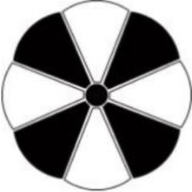
The motif, or its designated name, in this classification, functions as the fundamental layer of meaning by which the motif is identified and recognised. This represents the primary signification or denotation, corresponding with Barthes’ concept of “*the first-order semiotic system*” in his theory of semantics. At this stage, only the name by which the motif is recognised is tagged and entered into the database. It should be mentioned that although there were lots of motifs with different names, only 80 motifs were selected due to the restrictions of the research. Table 3 presents the collection of motifs as well as the overall classification of formalistic classifications of motifs, based on the regions, placement of motifs on the kilims, and types of motifs.

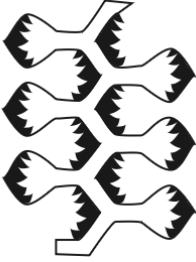




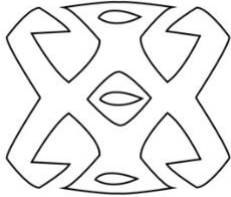






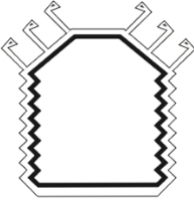

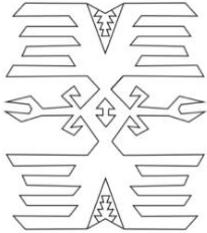



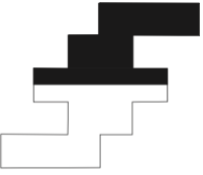

Table 3. Kilim Motif Classification and Collections

| Classification | Total | Description |
|------------------|-------|--|
| Motif Regions | 2 | Iran: (Qashqai, Bakhtiari, Azarbaijan, Khorasan, Kordestan), Serbia: (Pirot) |
| Motif Placements | 2 | Borders, Centre |
| Motif Types | 4 | Human, Animal, Plants, Geometric |
| Motifs | 80 | Apron, Bird, Birdie (tiče), Birds head, Bombs, Butterfly, Camel, Chair, Comb, Cross, Crown Prince, Čurlinjak, Čendeli (Hook), Deer, Devil’s Knee (Vraško kolena), Diamond star Complex, Diamond star Simple, Dog, Dove, Dragon, Dust Kami, Eagle, Eight-pointed Star, Eye, Eye (Očilo), Fetter, Fingers, Fish, Flame, Flower, Flower (Lily), Flower (Marvel of Peru), French Candies, Fruit, Garden pond, German box, Goat, Hen, Hook, Jackal, Kuveri (smirna pattern), Left ring, Lion, Lion Paws, Litije or Rhipides, Little Devils, Lizard plate, Man, Mara Convent, Mihrab, Mirror, Octopus (Atapot) Opanak Shoes, Peacock, Perched doves, Phoenix, Queen’s Sleeve, Ram’s Horn, Raven, Rašić’s Pattern, Rooster, Roses, Scissors, Scorpion, Snake, Sofra, Soldier, Soveljka (Shuttle), Stairs, Star, Swastika, Tree of Life, Triangle, Tulip, Turtle, Turtle (željka), Wheat, Wolf Mouth, Woman, Zigzag. |

Among these eighty selected motifs, forty motifs are repeated frequently and appear in most kilims. Table 4 shows the most common and frequent motifs on Iranian and Serbian kilims (Suri, 2018; Parham, 1992; Živadinović, 2022). It should also be noted that unlike Serbian kilims, the names of motifs differ in Iranian kilims, and as 2.3.1 pointed out, this is due to the differences in kilims around the various cultural and linguistic regions of the country. Different areas may refer to the same motif by different names. Thus, an attempt was made in this thesis to use the most frequently used names.

Table 4. Most Common Motifs in Iranian and Serbian Kilims (Author)

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |
| Bird's head | Bird's head | Bird's head | Bird's head |
|  |  |  |  |
| Ram's horn | Comb | Fetter | Marvel of Peru (Flower) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Chalipa | Garden pond | Dimond star | Dimond star |
|  |  |  |  |
| Goat | Snake | Left ring (Water) | Dust Kami (Flower) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Peacock | Tree | Two-headed bird | Flower |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |
| Kostence (Lion paws) | Stolica (Chair) | Željka (Turtle) | Očilo (eye) |
|  |  |  |  |
| Atapot (Octopus) | Čendeli (Hook) | Vraško koleno (Devil's knee) | Bombs |
|  |  |  |  |
| German box | Soveljka (Shuttle) | Sofra | Litije or rhipides |
|  |  |  |  |
| Mihrab (Mirror) | Tree of life | Rašić's Pattern | French candies |
|  |  |  |  |
| Apron | Rose | Little almonds | Dove |

3.4.2 Motif Semantic Classifications

In this study, the semantic classification of motifs was carried out through a two-stage annotation process to uncover both the deeper meanings and the contextual relationships of the motifs. In the first stage of semantic classification of annotation, *the connotative meanings of the motifs* were tagged and classified. This step required a close exploration of the cultural, historical, and symbolic associations related to each motif, which went beyond their literal or surface-level interpretations. Through this process, the symbolic meanings, historical or cultural meanings of the motifs, were collected and then documented. The annotation in this stage was done by reviewing related literature, consultations with experts, and contextual understanding, allowing the connotative meanings to remain true to their authentic cultural and artistic significance in the motifs.

In the second stage of semantic classification (which will later be introduced as Stage 7 of motif annotation), the motifs were categorised within the thematic domains. Therefore, motifs were classified into separate groups according to their common themes, symbolic functions, and narrative purposes. The thematic domains were carefully defined so that they both included reflecting repeated patterns, meanings, and cultural relevance, like nature, spirituality, mythology, social identity, or ritualistic significance. This innovative classification of motifs as both structural systems and cultural narratives enabled a framework for analysing how motifs functioned as components of a broader and interconnected visual language. The thematic classification enables identifying patterns of meaning and demonstrating how individual motifs interacted with each other and with their larger cultural and artistic settings. Each stage not only defined a semantic framework for analysing the motifs but also shed light on their cultural and artistic significance in the context of the research.

3.4.2.1 Stage (6) Annotating the Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning, as discussed in Section 3.4, is based on Roland Barthes' theory of the "*second-order semiotic system*." This system builds upon the first-order signification, which serves as its foundation. The first-order signification, annotated in this study as "Motif," provides the denotative or literal meaning of a sign. In contrast, the second-order signification, annotated here as "*Connotative Meaning*," goes beyond the literal interpretation to include symbolic or cultural meanings, encompassing broader cultural, social, and ideological concepts. This dual-layered approach ensures a deeper understanding of motifs, recognising not only their visual and structural elements but also the cultural and symbolic messages they convey. Since each motif may carry multiple layers of connotations, this study focuses on identifying the main and most overarching symbolic meaning for each motif, prioritising clarity and consistency in analysis. Tables 5 and 6, respectively, present the motifs on Iranian and Serbian kilims along with their connotative meanings (Cooper, 1987, Cirlot, & Cirlot, 1995, Chevalier, 1996, Biedermann, 1994, Liungman, 1994, Nedeljković, 1990, Čajkanović, 2021, Shoja'i, 2021).

Table 5. Iranian Common Kilim Motifs with Connotative Meanings

| | Motif | Connotative Meaning | | Motif | Connotative Meaning |
|----|----------------------|---------------------|----|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Birds' head | Pray for Rain | 25 | Man | Masculinity |
| 2 | Butterfly | Rebirth | 26 | Peacock | Immortality |
| 3 | Camel | Stamina | 27 | Stairs | Running water |
| 4 | Comb | Rain | 28 | Ram's Horn | Fertility |
| 5 | Deer | Fertility | 29 | Rooster | Messenger |
| 6 | Diamond Star Comp | Eternity | 30 | S (Goat horn) | Masculinity |
| 7 | Diamond Star Simple | Eternity | 32 | Snake | Protection |
| 8 | Dog | Faithfulness | 33 | Bird | Freedom |
| 9 | Dove | Peace | 34 | Star | Happiness |
| 10 | Dust Kami | Birth of Mehr | 35 | Chalipa (Swastika) | Eternity |
| 11 | Eight-pointed Star | Sun | 36 | Garden Pond | Spirituality |
| 12 | Eye | Protection | 37 | Tree of Life | Eternity |
| 13 | Fetter | Unity | 38 | Triangle | Mountain |
| 14 | Fingers | Protection | 39 | Turtle | Fertility |
| 15 | Fish | Life | 40 | Wheat | Fertility of land |
| 16 | Flower | Beauty | 41 | Woman | Marriage |
| 17 | Flower (Lily) | Sun | 42 | Eagle | Power |
| 18 | Flower (Marvel Peru) | Sky entrances | 43 | Hen | Wealth |
| 19 | Goat | Masculinity | 44 | Phoenix | Rebirth |
| 20 | Hook | Unity | 31 | Scissors | Marriage |
| 21 | Octopus | Protection | 45 | Raven | Bad luck |
| 22 | Jackal | Protection | 46 | Scorpion | Protection |
| 23 | Zigzag | Running water | 47 | Wolf Mouth | Protection |
| 24 | Left ring | Water | | | |
| 25 | Lion | Monarchy | | | |

Table 6. Serbian Common Kilim Motifs with Connotative Meanings

| | Motif | Connotative Meaning | | Motif | Connotative Meaning |
|----|------------------------------|---------------------|----|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Apron | Femininity | 20 | Little Devils | Duality |
| 2 | Birdie (tiče) | Freedom | 21 | Lizard plate | Adaptability |
| 3 | Bombs | Power | 22 | Mara Convent | Condemnation |
| 4 | Chair | Authority | 23 | Mihrab | Sacred Space |
| 5 | Comb | Marriage | 24 | Mirror | Truth |
| 18 | Kuveri | Protection | 25 | Octopus | Protection |
| 6 | Cross | Protection | 26 | Octopus (Atapot) | Protection |
| 7 | Crown Prince | Power | 27 | Opanak Shoes | Tradition |
| 8 | Čurlinjak | Eternity | 28 | Perched doves | Peace |
| 9 | Devil's Knee (Vraško kolena) | Protection | 29 | Queen's Sleeve | Nobility, Elegance |
| 10 | Dove | Peace | 30 | Rašić's Pattern | Honor |
| 11 | Dragon | Power | 31 | Roses | Affection |
| 12 | Eye (Očilo) | Protection | 32 | Sofra | Unity |
| 13 | Flame | Purification | 33 | Soldier | Protection |
| 14 | French Candies | Happiness | 34 | Soveljka (Shuttle) | Connection |
| 15 | Fruit | Abundance | 35 | Tree of Life | Eternity |
| 16 | German box | Wholeness | 36 | Tulip | Rebirth |
| 17 | Čendeli | Support | 37 | Turtle (željka) | Longevity |
| 19 | Lion Paws | Strength | 38 | Litije or Rhipides | Spirituality |

3.4.2.2 Stage (7) Categorising Motifs Within Thematic Domains

Due to the extensive range and rich diversity of connotative meanings of kilim motifs and the broad range of connotative meanings that are associated with them, developing a thematic classification was essential so that motifs with similar semantic characteristics could be organised systematically for analysis. This classification not only contributes to improve the efficiency of the analysis, but also facilitates the organization and meaningful exploration of the cultural, symbolic and artistic values in the motifs, thus providing a perceptible framework for understanding their deeper meaning. Thus, five overall *thematic domains* were established, with each specific domain of connotative meaning. They include:

- (1) **Spirituality and Divine:** This domain includes the motifs that convey spiritual values, beliefs, religious symbols, and divine connections. Such motifs usually represent faith, appreciation, and spiritual concepts.
- (2) **Protection and Power:** Motifs within this theme are linked to protection, whether to protect individuals, homes, or communities, or also strength, authority, or resilience. Such motifs are often symbolic of protection, talismans, and mythological figures associated with strength.
- (3) **Life and Nature:** This domain classifies motifs inspired by nature, such as plants, animals, and natural elements. They are also a symbol of balance between human life and nature as well as growth, life, and cycles.

- (4) **Cultural Identity and Social Values:** Motifs in this thematic domain signify cultural customs, social structures, and collective identities. They frequently communicate shared values, community ties, and cultural heritage through visual symbols.
- (5) **Fertility and Renewal:** This category contains motifs for creation, reproduction, and renewal. Derived from the rich cultural heritage of many of these communities, they often embody symbols of hope and prosperity as well as the cycles of life in a way that is deeply connected to the values of the culture(s) and family(ies) where they are being produced.

This thematic classification offers a strong basis on how motifs can be grouped into semantically relevant categories, allowing recognition of motifs, similarities, and contrasts within and between themes. This structured classification allows for a deeper exploration of the semantic relationships and cultural or symbolic meanings that connect motifs within each domain. Table 7 presents the collection of connotative meanings and thematic domains of motifs. This table includes 48 common and frequently used motifs identified in Iranian and Serbian kilims, along with their connotative meanings and five thematic domains.

Additionally, Table 8 offers the classification of motifs and their connotative meanings within thematic domains and represents how connotative meanings are systematically grouped. Together, these two tables provide a comprehensive resource for analysing the kilim motifs, while the thematic classification serves as a foundational tool for the study of their semiotics.

Table 7. Connotative Meanings and Thematic Domains of Motifs

| Classification | Total | Description |
|---------------------------------------|-------|---|
| Motif Connotative Meanings | 48 | Protection, Eternity, Sun, Rebirth, Marriage, Fertility, Peace, Support, Masculinity, Freedom, Happiness, Spirituality, Running water, Rain, Power, Strength, Tradition, Devotion, Sacred Space, Truth, Mountain, Connection, Affection, Immortality, Nobility, Elegance, Bad luck, Honor, Duality, Messenger, Adaptability, Femininity, Monarchy, Water, Wealth, Cycle, Abundance, Sky entrances, Beauty, Passion (love), Blessing, Unity, Birth of Mehr, Protection (guardian), Faithfulness, Authority, Tolerance, Fertility of land |
| Motif Thematic Domains | 5 | Spirituality and Divine, Protection and Power, Life and Nature, Cultural Identity and Social Values, Fertility and Renewal |

Table 8. Motifs and Their Connotative Meanings Within Thematic Domains

| Motifs Connotative Meanings and Thematic Domains | | |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Thematic Domain Protection and Power | | |
| No | Motif | Connotative Meaning |
| 1 | Bombs | Power |
| 2 | Chair | Authority |
| 3 | Cross | Protection |
| 4 | Crown Prince | Power |
| 5 | Devil's Knee | Protection |
| 6 | Dragon | Protection |
| 7 | Eagle | Power |
| 8 | Eye | Protection |
| 9 | Fingers | Protection |
| 10 | Jackal | Protection |
| 11 | Kuveri (Smirna Pattern) | Protection |
| 12 | Lion | Monarchy |
| 13 | Lion Paws | Strength |
| 14 | Scorpion | Protection |
| 15 | Snake | Protection |
| 16 | Soldier | Protection |
| 17 | Wolf Mouth | Protection |
| | | |
| Thematic Domain 2. Spirituality and Divine | | |
| No. | Motif | Connotative Meaning |
| 1 | Bird's Head | Pray for Rain |
| 2 | Chalipa (Swastika) | Eternity |
| 3 | Diamond Star | Eternity |
| 4 | Dust Kami | Birth of Mehr |
| 5 | Flame | Purification |
| 6 | Flower (Marvel of Peru) | Sky Entrances |
| 7 | Garden Pond (Toranj) | Spirituality |
| 8 | German Box | Wholeness |
| 9 | Litje or Rhipides | Spirituality |
| 10 | Little Devils | Duality |
| 11 | Mihrab | Sacred Space |
| 12 | Peacock | Immortality |
| 13 | Tree of Life | Eternity |

| Thematic Domain 3. Life and Nature | | |
|---|--------------------|----------------------------|
| No. | Motif | Connotative Meaning |
| 1 | Comb | Rain |
| 2 | Eight-pointed Star | Sun |
| 3 | Fish | Life |
| 4 | Flower | Beauty |
| 5 | Flower (Lily) | Sun |
| 6 | Left Ring | Water |
| 7 | Raven | Bad Luck |
| 8 | Rooster | Messenger |
| 9 | Stairs | Running Water |
| 10 | Star | Happiness |
| 11 | Triangle | Mountain |
| 12 | Zigzag | Running Water |
| | | |
| Thematic Domain 4. Fertility and Renewal | | |
| No. | Motif | Connotative Meaning |
| 1 | Apron | Femininity |
| 2 | Butterfly | Rebirth |
| 3 | Comb | Marriage |
| 4 | Deer | Fertility |
| 5 | Fish | Fertility |
| 6 | Fruit | Abundance |
| 7 | Goat | Masculinity |
| 8 | Hen | Wealth |
| 9 | Man | Masculinity |
| 10 | Phoenix | Rebirth |
| 11 | Ram's Horn | Fertility |
| 12 | Scissors | Marriage |
| 13 | Turtle | Fertility |
| 14 | Wheat | Fertility of Land |
| 15 | Woman | Marriage |

| Thematic Domain 5. Cultural Identity and Social Values | | |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|
| No. | Motif | Connotative Meaning |
| 1 | Bird | Freedom |
| 2 | Birdie (tiče) | Freedom |
| 3 | Camel | Tolerance |
| 4 | Čendeli | Support |
| 5 | Dog | Faithfulness |
| 6 | Dove | Peace |
| 7 | Fetter | Unity |
| 8 | French Candies | Happiness |
| 9 | Hook | Unity |
| 10 | Lizard Plate | Adaptability |
| 11 | Mara Convent | Condemnation |
| 12 | Mirror | Truth |
| 13 | Opanak Shoes | Tradition |
| 14 | Perched Doves | Peace |
| 15 | Queen's Sleeve | Nobility, Elegance |
| 16 | Rašić's Pattern | Honor |
| 17 | Roses | Affection |
| 18 | Sofra | Unity |
| 19 | Soveljka (Shuttle) | Connection |
| 20 | Željka (Turtle) | Longevity |

3.5 Developing a Tagset for Motif Annotation

Based on the systematic classification and motif annotation scheme, a comprehensive Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT) has been developed. This tagset serves as a framework for organising the diversity of motifs found in kilim designs and is considered a standardised approach for recognising and analysing them. The KMT is a complete, systematic representation of the motifs that includes both the forms and semantics of each motif. It includes several elements that provide a multi-dimensional understanding of each motif. First, it includes classifying the regions where motifs are found, which is connected to the geographical and cultural context in which they are designed and used. Second, it addresses motif placement, describing how and where motifs appear in kilim compositions specifically, placed as central figures, border patterns, or decorative accents, underscoring their functional and aesthetic roles. Third, it classifies the *types of motifs* according to visual features, structural forms, and thematic relevance. And finally, the connotations of motifs are recorded, highlighting their deeper meaning, cultural connections, and symbolic interpretations based on historical, artistic, and ethnographic studies. Each motif in the tagset has a unique ID code to ensure accurate identification. This coding system facilitates the detection and comparison of motifs while also allowing researchers and practitioners to easily track specific motifs across contexts, kilim examples, and thematic frameworks. Table 9 presents an overview of KMT

sample, which is a structured summary of the classification. It shows how each motif is categorised and annotated based on defined criteria. By combining these layers of informative tags, the KMT helps the systematic study and documentation of kilim motifs for qualitative and comparative analyses.

Table 9. Kilim Motif Tagset (*Sample*)

| Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT) | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| M. ID | Motif Region | Motif Placement | Motif Type | | | | Semantic Classification | |
| | | | Human Motifs | Animal Motifs | Plant Motifs | Geometric Abstract Motifs | | |
| | | | Motifs | | | | Thematic Domains | Connotative Meaning |
| | Serbia, Pirot | Border (margin) | Man | Bird | Flower | Bird | Spirituality of Devine | Adaptability |
| | Iran, Qashqai (T) | Body (Centre) | Woman | Camel | Lily | Bombs | Protection and Power | Adornment |
| | Iran, Bakhtiari (L) | | Eye | Crab | Rose | Comb | Life and Nature | Authority |
| | Iran, Azarbaijan(T) | | Hand | Deer | Tree | Devil's Knee | Cultural Identity and S. Values | Beauty |
| | Iran, Kurdistan (K) | | Head | Dog | Marvel of Peru | Diamond | Fertility and Renewal | Devotion |
| | Iran, Khorasan | | Finger | Dove | Wheat | Doll | | Duality |
| | | | Soldier | Dragon | Lotus | Star | | Elegance |
| | | | Girl | Fish | Tulip | Fetter | | Fertility |
| | | | | Goat | Carnation | Hook | | Happiness |
| | | | | Jackel | | Ring | | Hospitality |
| | | | | Lion | | Toranj | | Love |
| | | | | Peacock | | Mirror | | Nobility |
| | | | | Rooster | | Moon | | Organization |
| | | | | Snake | | Plate | | Passion |
| | | | | Sparrow | | Scissors | | Peace |
| | | | | Turtle | | Shuttle | | Power |
| | | | | Duck | | Star | | Protection |
| | | | | Rams Horn | | Stairs | | Spirituality |
| | | | | Octopus | | Chalipa | | Stability |
| | | | | Butterfly | | Zigzag | | Tradition |
| | | | | Lion pawn | | Crown | | Truth |
| | | | | | | Apron | | Wealth |

3.6 Conclusion of Chapter 3

This chapter presents the research methodology for identifying, classifying, and analysing motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims, based on the thesis's theoretical framework of a semiotic-anthropological approach. The methodology, which is divided into three main stages, aims to systematically explore kilim motifs and patterns, with a focus on their cultural and symbolic meanings. The first stage of this methodology focused on gathering data and

building a database of kilim motifs. Motifs from Iranian and Serbian kilims were collected from various materials, including catalogues, articles, books, and visual records. To achieve consistency in the identification of motifs, specific standards were defined for selecting motifs from different sources, regardless of their shape, size, or colour. The gathered data, motifs, then were stored in a Microsoft Excel database, which is an accessible system for storing the collected information. The second stage focused on a detailed model for annotating each motif, both form and meaning. To this aim, Barthes' semiotic theory, which distinguishes between literal (denotative) and symbolic (connotative) meanings, was adopted as a theoretical framework to interpret the motifs. Each motif was annotated with a unique identifier, i.e. Motif ID, and classified by origin, placement, type, and design characteristics as part of a form-based annotation. The meaning-based annotation added another layer by exploring the symbolic meanings of each motif to provide a deeper understanding of its cultural and social context. This multi-layered classification system functioned as a complex framework for the analyses. At this stage, the Kilim Motif Tagset (KMT) was developed for labelling the motifs and standardising their categorisation. The KMT categorises the motifs by region, placement, type, and symbolic meaning. This tagset helps to organise research results and keep consistency across the research for quantitative and qualitative analysis. The third stage, which will be further detailed in Chapter 4, applies statistical analyses to the annotated data. This phase is undertaken by utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods, and its objective is to uncover the similarities and dissimilarities of motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims. These analyses shed light on cultural connections, unique symbolic expressions, and the broader anthropological markers embedded within the motifs of every region. In the end, comparing and contrasting motifs helps to envisage the particular cultural, historical, and symbolic narratives depicted via kilim designs.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents a comparison of the kilim motifs of Iran and Serbia. The findings are organised in four parts, which include both quantitative and qualitative methods, involving a brief overview of the structural makeup, detailed classification of different types of motifs, statistical analysis concerning frequency and distribution of the motifs, and meanings of the motifs from semiotic and anthropological semiotic viewpoint.

4.1 Introduction

The study presents its findings in four distinct sections based on the corpus reports, with the analyses structured into four main sections. The first section provides a description and analysis of the different structural layouts of kilims. The placement of motifs and their distribution on the kilim are presented in this section. Statistical data are provided in the quantitative analysis section, where the obtained statistics are analysed in detail in relation to the research questions. Subsequently, in the qualitative analysis section, the most commonly used motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims are examined, with a focus on their mythological, historical, cultural, and social roots. The findings from these three sections lead to a comparative analysis of motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims. In the final section, a case study is conducted to analyse and examine several kilim samples.

4.2 The Design Structure and Composition Style of Patterns and Motifs

The initial focus in examining kilim motifs should be on the design structure embedded in the woven kilim. Kilim motifs and designs, besides expressing a wide range of patterns and motifs through stylistic variations, also follow a consistent compositional framework. This consistency indicates weaving traditions rooted in the culture, beliefs of a society and the collective identity passed down through generations during the cultural history of a community. The arrangement of motifs and patterns in borders, central medallions, or repeating artistic elements follow specific orders, which reflect not only the aesthetic norms of the given regions but also their symbolic and cultural essential priorities. Moreover, the diversity and density of the motifs through the kilims often vary in different regions, which emphasises the cultural diversity of kilim weaving art in two countries. In some regions of Iran and Serbia, kilims with a high density of motifs are found, which, in addition to demonstrating the skill and experience of the weaver, reflect the specific use of the kilim or the combined message of the motifs. These kilims are often designed to convey specific messages or represent cultural, social, or religious values. In these types of kilims, motifs are deliberately placed together to express stories, beliefs, or ethnic and religious traditions. Each motif in these kilims has a specific meaning through which the weaver intended to convey a specific message. In contrast, kilims with a simpler motif density focus more on simplicity and balance. These types of kilims are usually designed with fewer motifs and they emphasise a specific concept or message that lies behind the design. These types of kilims are mostly woven for ordinary use as floor coverings in residential areas. Based on the contrast between more densely woven kilims and simpler ones, each one serves a different purpose or meets the aesthetic needs of a community. This shows whether the kilim was meant to be used for everyday usage or for religious or special ceremonies. Understanding the structure of the design and the significance of motifs based on regional variation helps understanding the wide range of techniques and styles that weavers from different tribes and regions use. Additionally, the culture of each society influences the significance of symbolic meaning and the artistic and cultural heritage of each motif.

4.2.1 The Design Structure

In general, the design structure of kilims can be classified into three parts from the outside to the inside. This does not imply that all kilims follow this specific design arrangement, as kilim designs display considerable diversity and variety. However, broadly speaking, the components of a kilim design can generally be categorised as follows.

- (1) **Borders:** Kilim borders are the decorative edges or margins which are used as frames surrounding the body of kilims. Kilim borders can be categorised into

different types based on their position: The “Outer Border” refers to the border furthest from the body, the “Main Border” is the primary decorative border surrounding the central field which is usually wider than two other types of borders and the “Inner Border” is located closest to the body or central design. Patterns and motifs are also placed on these borders, which are usually smaller in size.

- (2) **Body:** Within the borders is body of the kilim, which serves as the central area, and the majority of motifs are typically displayed in this part.
- (3) **Centre:** In some kilims, especially Iranian kilims, there is a part as the centre of the kilim, where the medallion design is usually placed on it. The design structure of kilims does not completely follow this composition; however, border/s and body are common in all design structures. Figure 17 shows the main design and compositions of patterns of kilims in Iran and Serbia.

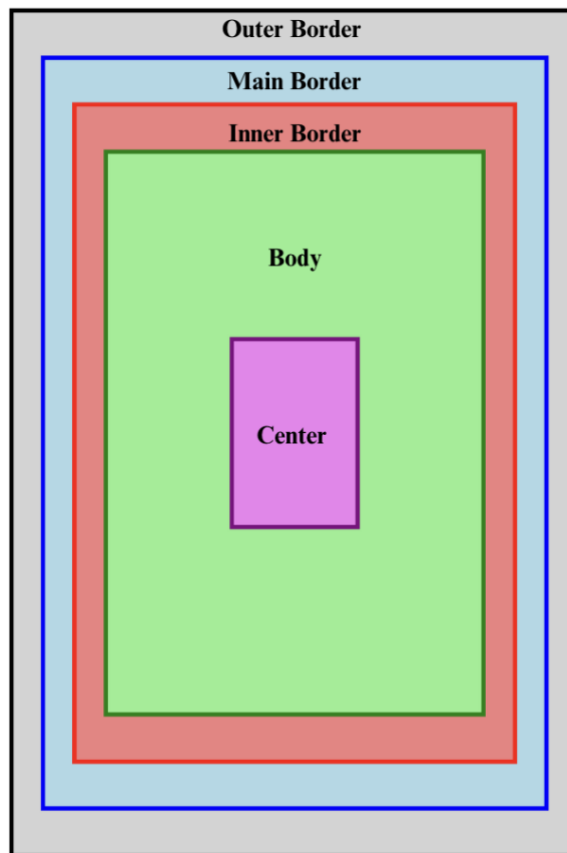


Figure 17. The Design Structure of the Kilims

4.2.2 The Composition Layout of Patterns and Motifs

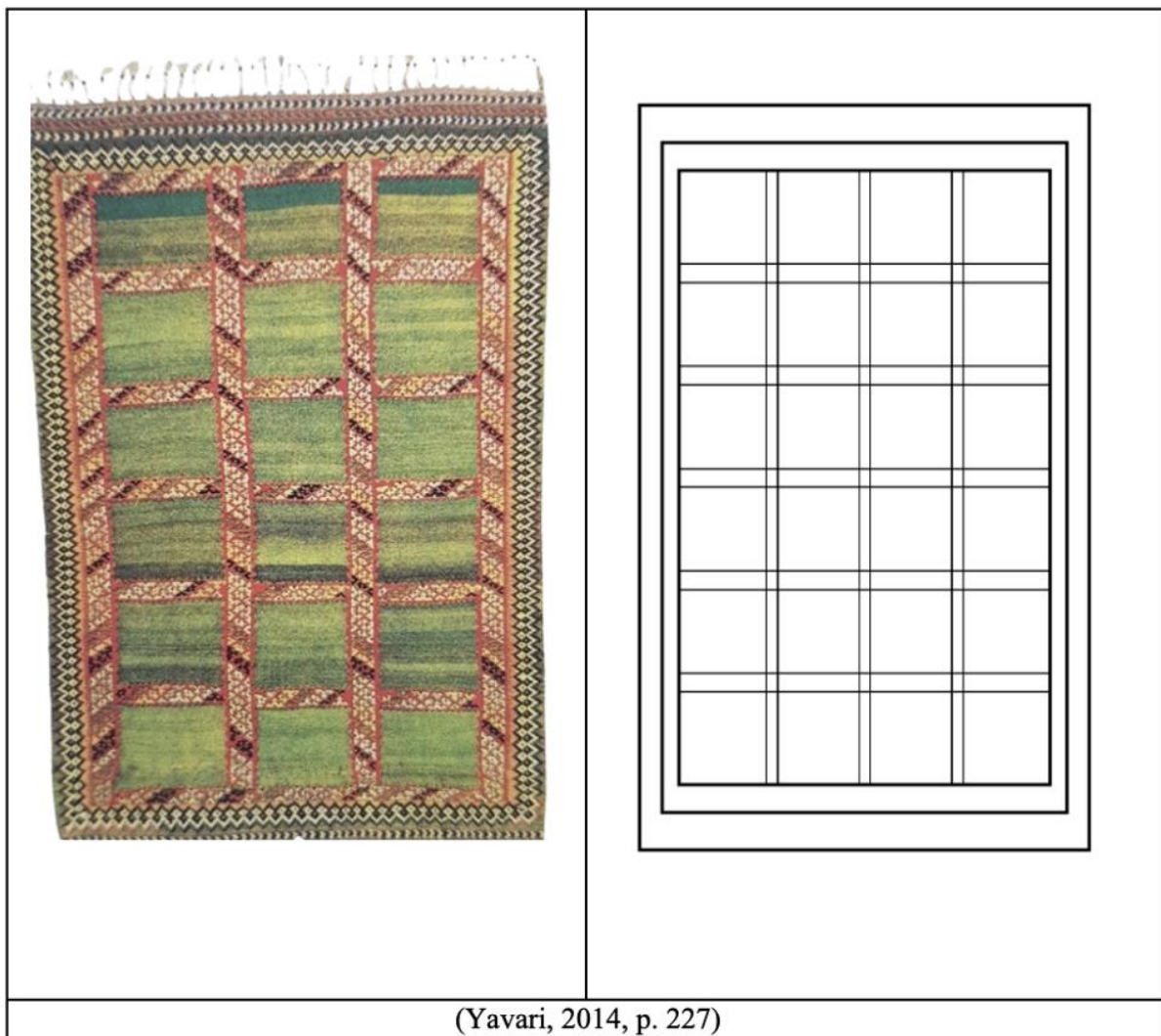
The arrangement and placement of motifs in kilims illustrate the variety of designs. Analysing the collected samples of thesis database, three main layouts can be recognized: Geometric, Mahramat and the Medallion. Geometric layout, which features symmetrical shapes repeating through the patterns, is more popular and highly used in both countries, and is common among all regions in Iran and Pirot city in Serbia. Mahramat layout, which may be the closest design to the found in Serbia as “Kashmir”, is potentially shared between the two countries and is characterized by striped ornaments. The Medallion layout, which is surrounded by borders and represents a garden, is unique to Iranian kilims but is also found in Serbian kilims.

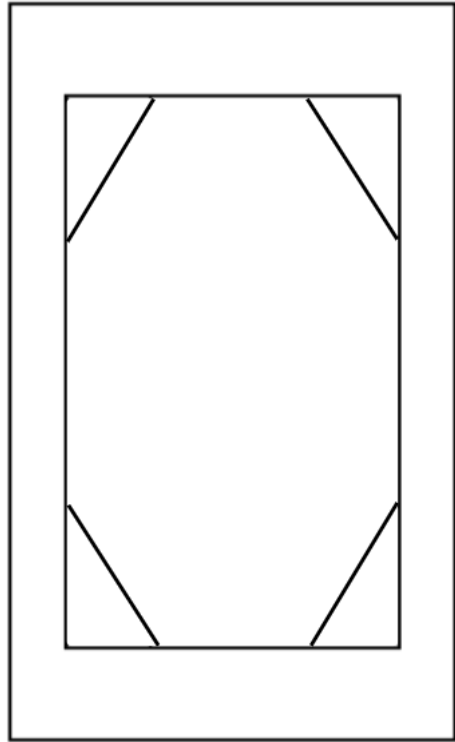
4.2.3 Geometric Composition Layout

The geometric layout in kilim composition is the most commonly used arrangement in kilim patterns. This layout consists of a rich variety of geometric shapes, providing a foundational structure that enhances both creativity and uniformity in design. Typically, geometric motifs and ornaments are arranged in a symmetrical composition, creating harmony and balance within the overall design. This type of arrangement reflects the weaving techniques as well as order that is rooted in traditional weaving cultures. However, an alternative approach within this layout involves the intentional placement of elements in a scattered pattern. The irregular arrangement of geometric motifs provides a dynamic aesthetic and creates a visually striking effect. In addition to enhancing dynamism, such designs contrast with the composition of more traditional symmetrical layouts. These alterations and irregularity of geometric composition layout demonstrates the adaptability and capacity of artistic expressions.

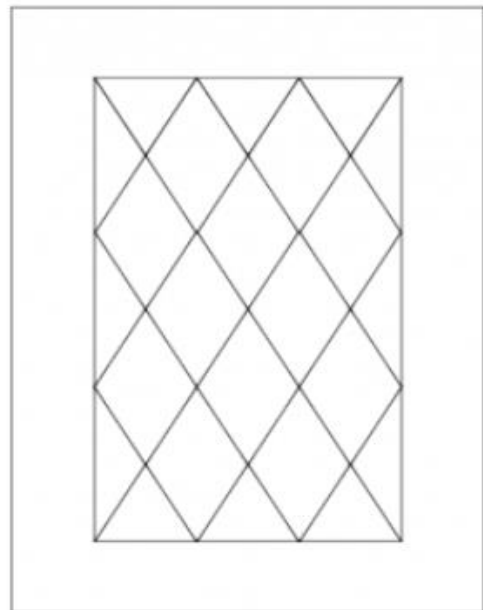
As illustrated in Table 10, the geometric composition layouts demonstrate a range of design possibilities, from completely ordered arrangements to deliberately irregular placement of motifs. This conformity and harmony add significantly to the special charm and fascinating popularity of the art of kilim weaving. It reflects not only the technical skill of the weaver but also the cultural and artistic richness embedded in the craft.

Table 10. Geometric Composition Layouts in Kilim Design





National Museum of Kruševac. (n.d.)



(Hall & Barnard, 1999, p. 67)

4.2.4 Mahramat Composition Layout

Mahramat is considered as one of the original and ancient styles of motif composition in Iranian kilims and tapestry. The unique characteristics make it special in traditional Iranian kilims. This layout holds a historical background significance, as its origins are traced back to the Achaemenid and Sassanid periods, reflecting its longstanding presence in Persian art and craftsmanship (Hajizadeh, 2015). In the Mahramat woven kilims, the body of the kilim is covered in a series of parallel stripes that run across the entire surface of kilim. These rows are characterized by patterns and motifs which are repeated constantly and harmonically along the stripes. It is believed that “Mahramat” is derived from the Middle Persian (Sasanian period) term “Mehrmatek”, which further emphasises the cultural and spiritual connections embedded in this style (Hosuri, 2002, p. 25). Historical evidence suggests that the Mahramat style is among the oldest known composition techniques, and the application of this layout extends beyond woven artifacts like carpets and kilims. The parallel row design has also been marked in pottery art works from the 11th and 12th centuries, highlighting the widespread use and appeal of this composition layout through various art work. Tables 11 and 12 provide a visual representation of this ancient style, illustrating striped rows with repetitive motifs inside that present Mahramat as a particular and culturally significant traditional design. In Serbian art of kilim weaving the closest design to Mahramat is Kashmir pattern. According to Živadinović (2022, p. 115) Kashmir is an old pattern, brought to Serbia as an inspiration by trade caravans from the Kashmir region.

Table 11. Sample of Mahramat Composition Style in Iranian Kilims

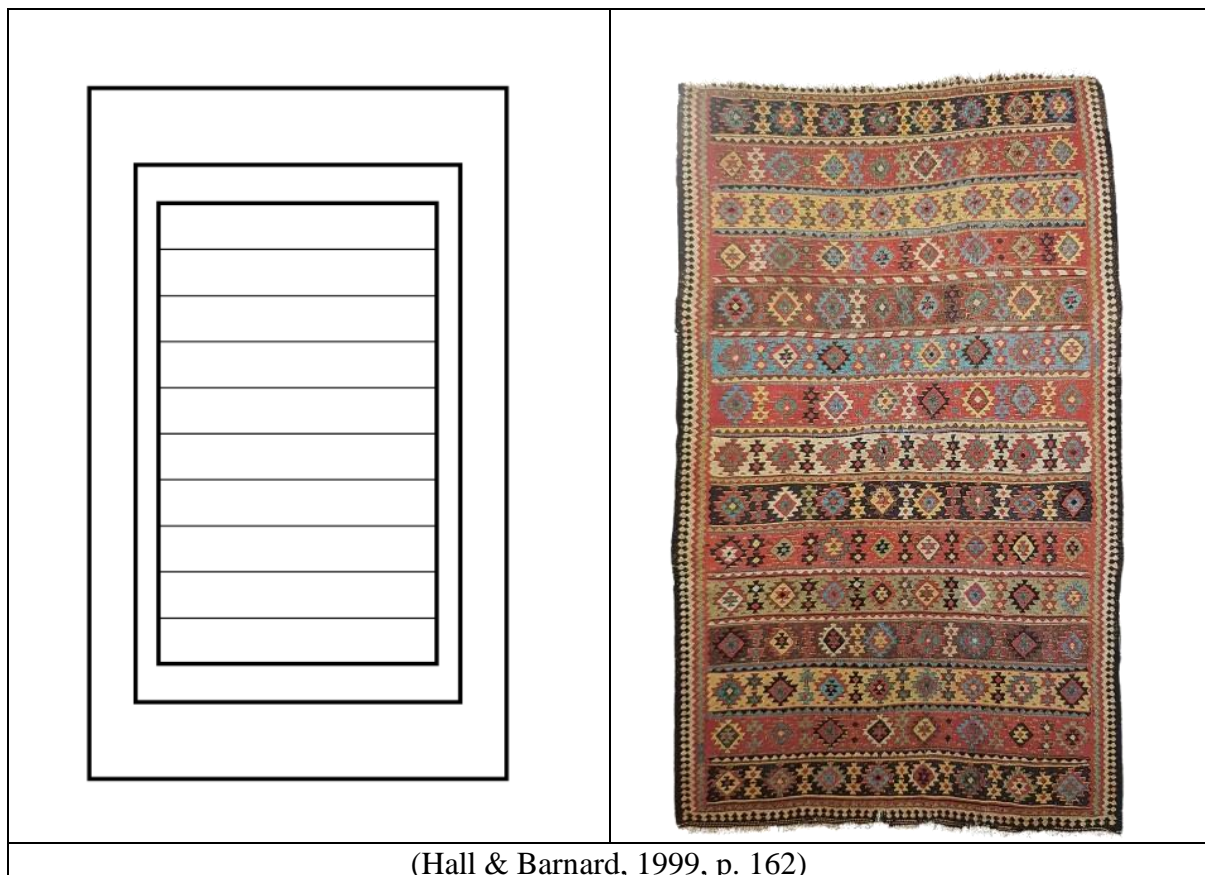


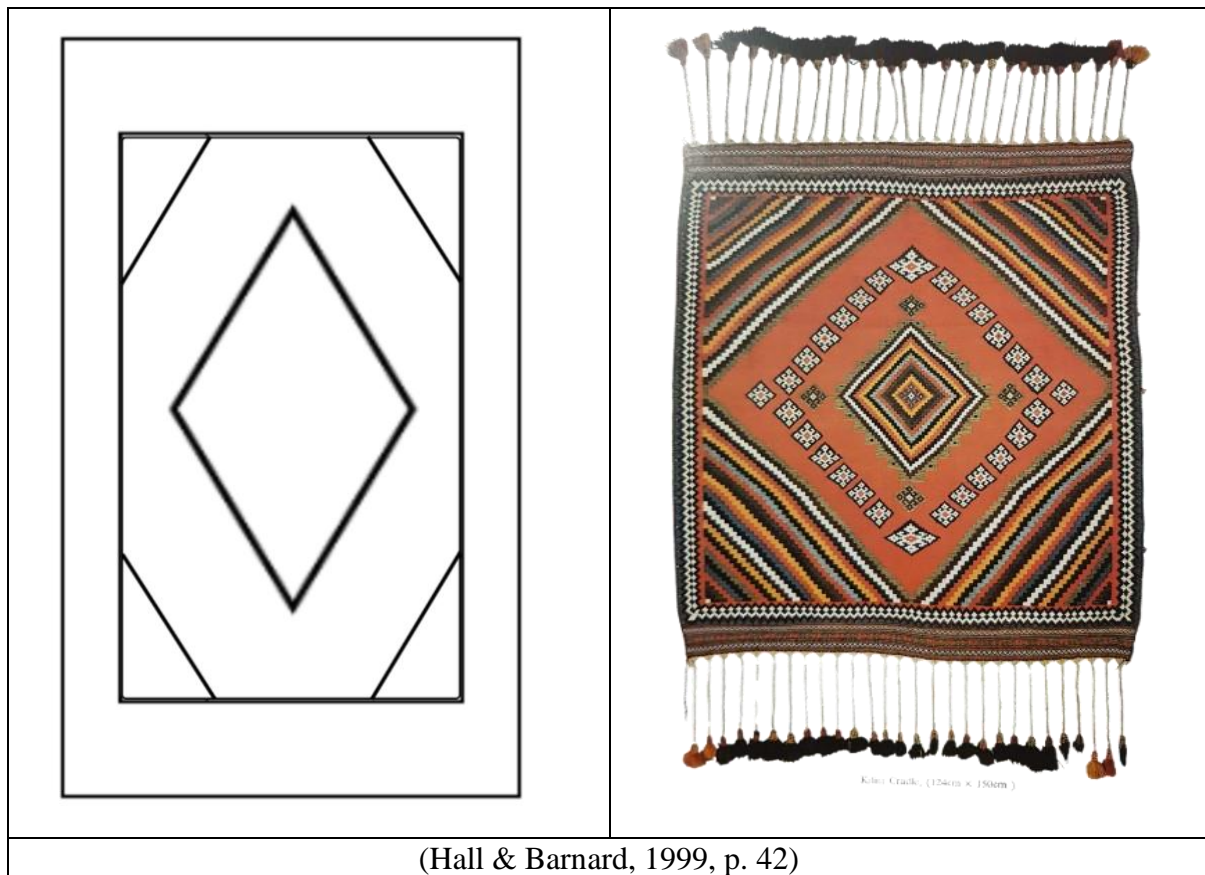
Table 12. Sample of Mahramat Composition Style in Serbian Kilims



4.2.5 Medallion Designs - Corners Composition Layout (Toranj)

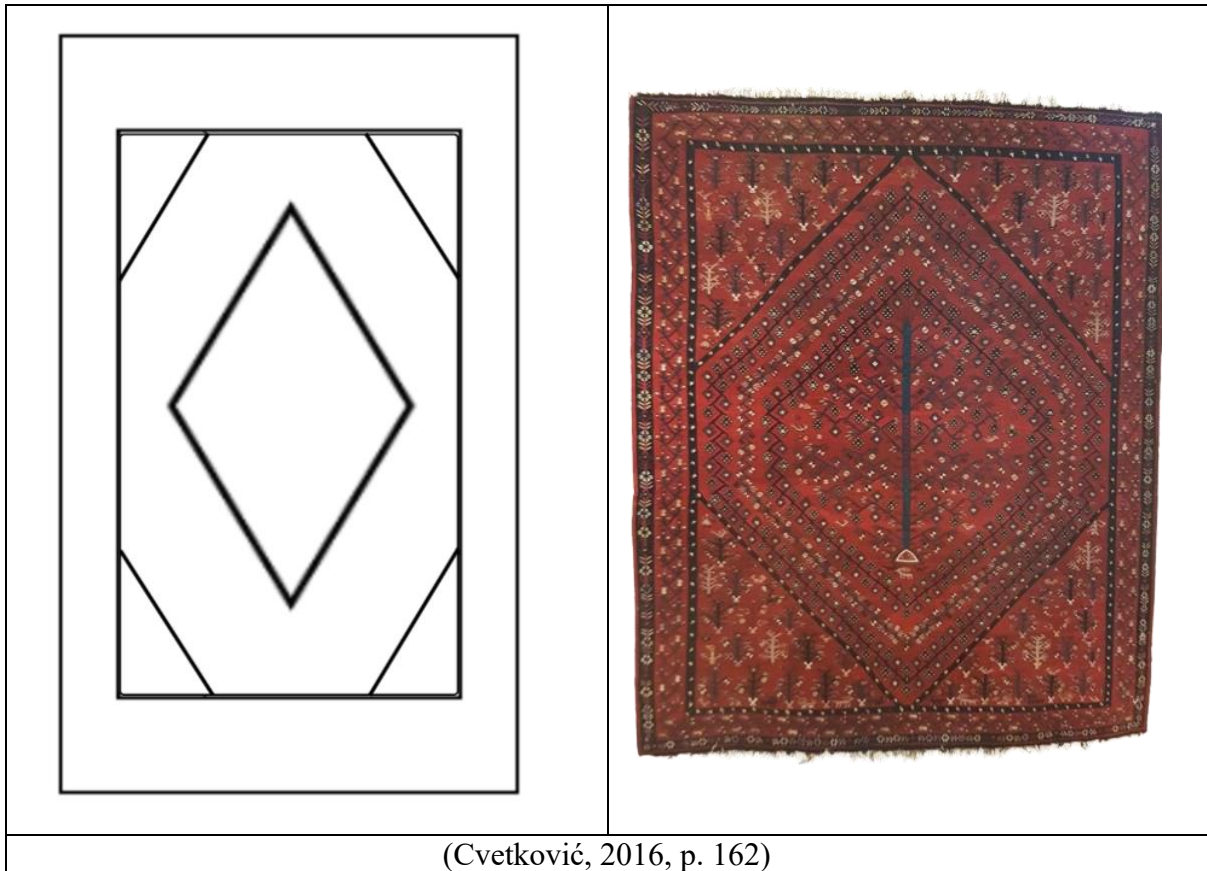
The Medallion design or as it is called Toranj in Persian is one of the most frequent compositions among the types of Iranian decorative arts. In Iranian art, Toranj is a type of pattern that is made from a combination of flowers and leaves and Arabesque designs, and is mostly used in architecture, paintings, carpets, kilims, tiles, and gilding and book designs. The most key feature of this combination is that it is placed precisely in the middle of the kilim and has an oval or polygonal shape. According to Mirzaamini and Bassam (2011, p. 12), Toranj's composition was formed in the field of mythological and symbolic concepts, such as a garden and a pond, but its evolution into its present form is a reflection of the Iranian Muslim artist's mentality, thoughts and aspirations in the manifestation the concept of paradise and spiritual space. Table 13 shows a sample of this layout.

Table 13. Medallion (Toranj) layout in the Persian kilim



The Medallion (Toranj) is an essential motif design in Iranian art and decorative patterns. This design is applied in various forms of Iranian art, including architecture, carpets, kilims, tiles, and book designs, where it typically occupies a central position with an oval or polygonal shape. The Toranj is not only exclusively decorative but also contains symbolic significance rooted in both pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions. This design, according to Azizi Bandarabadi *et al.*, (2021, p. 236), has been widely used in Qajar era decorations, particularly in mirror work of traditional houses, reflecting the cultural and religious heritage of Iranian art. In contemporary Iranian art, the Toranj motif continues to influence new works in different aspects of art. Artists such as Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian have integrated this traditional design into modern aesthetic expression of art, bridging historical and contemporary aesthetics (Dehkordi, 2021, p. 10). The use of Toranj and plant decorative units in Islamic architecture, especially in complex geometric and floral designs, according to Al-Arifi (2023, p. 77), led to the invention of arabesque art, which exemplifies the motif's role in creating visually stunning and symbolically rich environments. Moreover, the integration of Toranj-based motifs into Persian art illustrates the cross-cultural influences and the evolution of design elements over time. For instance, Chinoiserie motifs, which include floral patterns like peonies and lotuses, were adapted and integrated into Persian decorative arts, highlighting the fluid exchange of artistic ideas across cultures, and “stylized plant and natural motifs provided an impact of Persia’s possessing a direct symbolism and serving as models of paradise for the later Persians” (Sheikh, 2017, p. 1004). By examining Serbian kilim designs, a layout similar to the Iranian Toranj has been observed in Pirot kilims, which are designed in the form of hexagons and mostly feature plant motifs. Table 14 shows an example of a Pirot kilim with a hexagonal medallion layout.

Table 14. Medallion layout in the Serbian kilim



4.3 Quantitative Analysis Results

As mentioned in (3.3), the comparative analysis has been carried out on 200 kilims. Considering an equal distribution between Serbian and Iranian origins a total of 100 kilims from each region have been analysed. This equal selection of each region allows a balanced examination of the motifs and designs in both countries and cultural contexts. To achieve a methodical comparison, the featured motifs in these kilims were categorised using a predefined set of tags. The tags were applied as markers to classify recurring symbolic motifs and patterns to explain the embedded motifs of these aesthetic and cultural works of art. The tagging system used in this thesis was especially essential for maintaining consistency and objectivity in the analysis. By adopting the same evaluation criteria for both Serbian and Iranian kilims, it was possible to specify not only the motifs of each region but also common motifs shared between the two countries and to point out the cultural intersections and exchanges. This categorisation facilitated the quantification of data by allowing a statistical comparison of the distribution and frequency of various motifs and pattern and elements. In this section, the qualitative analysis of the research, the numerical data and statistical representation will be discussed. Furthermore, the qualitative dimensions, focusing on the symbolic and cultural meaning of the applied motifs of selected kilims will be interpreted. This includes an analysis of how recurring motifs and patterns reflect the cultural values, historical background, regional identities and set of beliefs and traditions of the two regions. The qualitative approach matches with the quantitative findings and provides an understanding of the artistic and cultural significance of the kilims. It allows for the exploration of symbolic interpretations that may not be evident through numbers

alone. Table 15 summarises the data collections of the research. The table provides a detailed of the identified motifs, their frequency across the samples, and their distribution patterns in Iranian and Serbian kilims. The information presented there forms the basis for a deeper discussion in subsequent sections regarding the cultural narratives and artistic traditions associated with these kilims. Overall, by integrating both quantitative and qualitative analyses, a comprehensive perspective on the kilims' artistic and cultural significance is achieved.

Table 15. Summary of Data Collected

| Motif Region | Sample kilims | Motif Tags | Motif Region | Sample kilims | MotifTags |
|--------------|---------------|------------|--------------|---------------|-----------|
| Iran | 100 | 414 | Serbia | 100 | 414 |

4.3.1 Distribution of Motifs on Iranian Kilims

Given that kilims are woven across many regions of Iran and considering the scope of this research, a sample of 100 kilims was selected from five prominent kilim-weaving regions. These regions include the Qashqai and Bakhtiari nomads, as well as Azerbaijan Province, Kurdistan Province, and Khorasan Province. From each region, 20 samples were randomly selected, and the motif tags were applied to them according to the established tagset. Table 16 illustrates the distribution of motif tags for each region:

Table 16. Distribution of Motif Tags in Iranian Kilims

| Regions | Sample kilims | Motif Tags |
|--------------|---------------|------------|
| Qashqai | 20 | 123 |
| Bakhtiari | 20 | 68 |
| Khorasan | 20 | 72 |
| Azerbaijan | 20 | 69 |
| Kurdistan | 20 | 82 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 414 |

Based on the research motif tagset (3.5), the collected sampled Iranian kilims were then categorised into three groupings: (1) Motif Placement, distinguishing motifs located on the borders or the centre (body) of the kilims; (2) Motif Types, including geometric and abstract motifs, animal motifs, plant motifs, and human motifs; and (3) Thematic Domains, representing motifs related to the Spirituality and Divine, Fertility and Renewal, Life and Nature, Protection and Power, Cultural Identity and Social Values, which will be reviewed separately as follows:

4.3.1.1 Motif Placement in Iranian Kilims

The placement of motifs in Iranian kilims shows a distinct pattern in distribution. The majority of motifs are located in the centre of kilims, and out of a total of 414 tags, 303 tags (73.19%) are located in the centre. Meanwhile, 111 tags, or 26.81% of the motifs, are tagged and placed in the borders of kilims. Therefore, the statistics indicate that the central part of the kilims, the kilim centre, serves as the primary space for presenting the artistic and symbolic

motifs, while the borders are more decorative and secondary. Diagram 1 shows the distribution of motif placement in Iranian kilims.

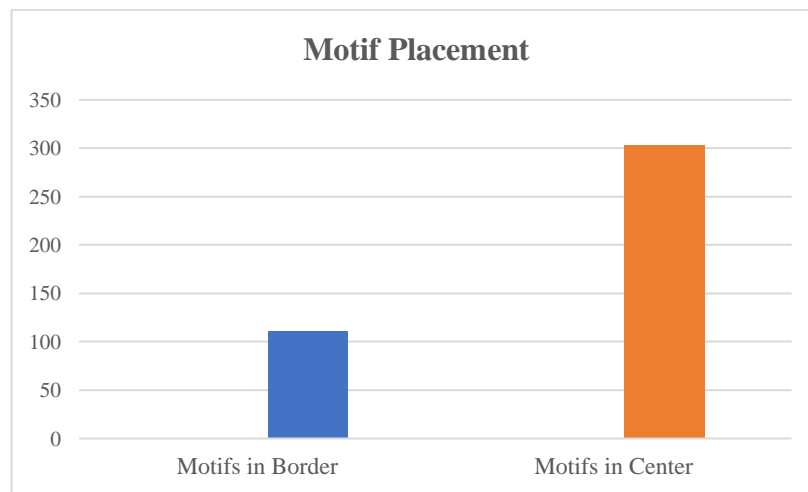


Diagram 1. Distribution of Motif Placement in Iranian kilims

4.3.1.2 Motif Type in Iranian Kilims

The motifs of Iranian kilims are mainly categorised in *geometric and abstract motif types*, which this group represents the largest category with 184 tags (45.89%) of the total motifs. These types of motifs are often recognised from perfectly patterned shapes, representing that ideas and cultural identifications can primarily be represented through this form. *Animal motifs* rank as the second most frequent motif types, including 123 tags (28.74%) of the total motif tags. These motif types indicate the importance of animals in the weavers' cultural or environmental context, which represents concepts such as power, protection, and fertility. *Plant motifs* come in third place with 79 tags (18.60% of the total tags). These motifs often include flowers, fruits, or trees and symbolically indicate divine concepts, nature, and life. The lower proportion of plant motifs compared to geometric and animal motif types may indicate the weaver's priorities in producing these kilim motifs. Finally, *human motifs* were the least common type of motif in the whole database, with only 28 tags (6.76%) of the motifs. Human motifs are mainly abstract and symbolic representations of human figures or even parts of bodies, like eyes or fingers, primarily symbolizing cultural beliefs rather than realistic portrayals. Diagram 2 illustrates the distribution of motif types in Iranian kilims, highlighting the dominance of geometric and abstract motif types while also showing the percentage of presence of animal, plant, and human motifs in the overall artistic and cultural expression of these textiles.

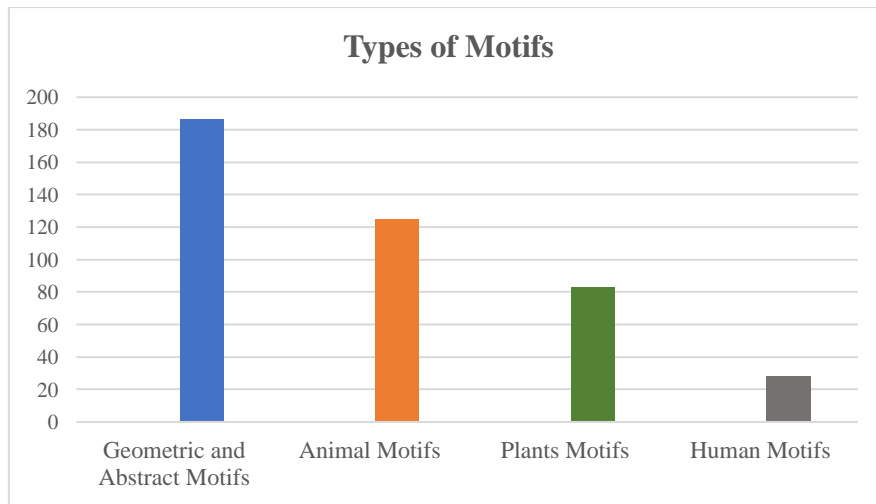


Diagram 2. Distribution of Motif Types in Iranian kilims

4.3.1.3 Motifs Thematic Domains in Iranian Kilims

The thematic domain tags generally provide valuable insight into the symbolic and cultural significance of the motifs found in kilim motifs. As for the Iranian kilims, and according to the reports of the database, motifs related to the “Spirituality and Divine” are the most common theme, with 133 tags, accounting for (32.13%) of the total. These motifs often reflect spiritual beliefs, cosmological symbols, or links with higher powers, emphasising the power of faith and mythology on Iranian weaving traditions. Motifs connected to “Life and Nature” come right after, accounting for 108 tags, or (26.07%) of the total. These motifs mainly include water and plants, symbolizing abundance, nourishment, and harmony with nature. It reflects the weavers’ deep connection to their daily lives and environment. The third most frequent thematic domain is “Protection and Power,” consisting of 79 tags and representing 18.06% of the total. The presence of these motifs serves an amuletic purpose, conveying concepts such as safety, good fortune, or the prevention of evil spirits, which truly reflect the cultural, philosophical, or superstitious beliefs of the communities. The theme “Fertility and Renewal” comes in the fourth rank with 53 tags (12.08%) of total tags. These motifs indicate the importance of fertility, giving birth, and making the group larger, which is significant for the weavers’ communities. Finally, “Cultural Identity and Social Values,” represented by 41 tags (9.89%), comes next in the fourth rank, referring to the elements of group identity shared by the weavers, such as tribal identity, historical myth, or communal symbols. Diagram 3 illustrates the distribution of thematic domains in which “Spirituality and Divine” and “Life and Nature” themes have the most frequency in Iranian motif interpretation, and after them come the themes “Protection and Power,” “Fertility and Renewal,” and “Cultural Identity and Social Values” at the end.

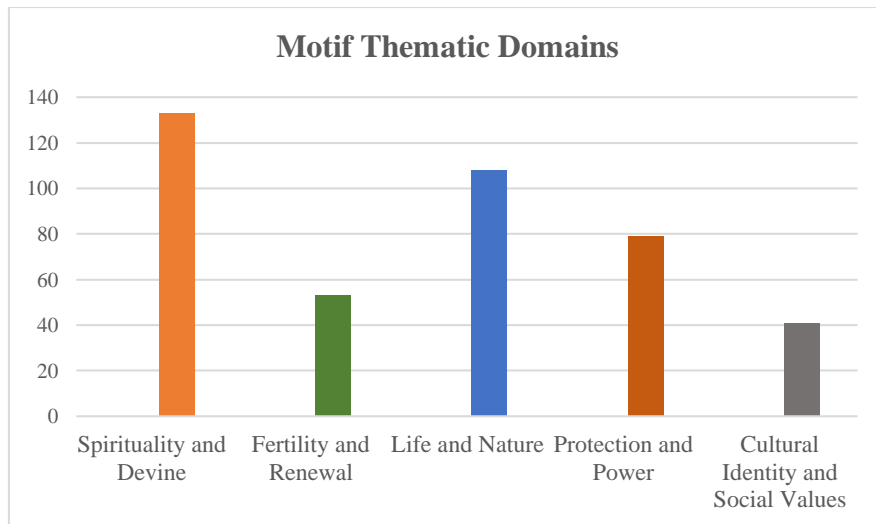


Diagram 3. Distribution of Motif Thematic Domains in Iranian kilims

Table 17 presents a comprehensive overview of the distribution of 414 motif tags from Iranian kilims within the research database. It categorises the motifs by their placement in the kilims, type, and thematic domains. This table provides valuable insight into understanding the forms and meanings (cultural-symbolic significance) of Iranian kilim motifs. The quantitative data highlights how the motifs are distributed and ranked across these categories.

Table 17. Distribution of Motif Tags in Iranian Kilims

| Motif Placement | | Motif Type | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Motif in Border | Motif in Centre | Geometric And Abstract Motifs | Animal Motifs | Plants Motifs | Human Motifs |
| 111 | 303 | 184 | 123 | 79 | 28 |
| 26.81% | 73.19% | 45.89% | 28.74% | 18.60% | 6.76% |
| Motifs Thematic Domains | | | | | |
| Spirituality and Divine | Fertility and Renewal | Life and Nature | Protection and Power | Cultural Identity and Social Values | |
| 133 | 53 | 108 | 79 | 41 | |
| 32.13% | 12.08% | 26.07% | 18.06% | 9.89% | |

4.3.2 Description and Analysis of Data for Iranian Kilims

The statistical distribution of motifs in Iranian kilims across five key regions studied in this research (Qashqai, Bakhtiari, Khorasan, Azerbaijan, and Kurdistan) shows significant variation in the number of motif tags across these regions with Qashqai kilims have the highest number (123 tags, 20.05%) and Bakhtiari kilims with the fewest (68 tags). Such a difference is

likely due to cultural and artistic priorities, Consequently, the Qashqai kilims in this study generally feature more designs and motifs than kilims from other regions, indicating that most parts of Qashqai kilims are covered in patterns and motifs. As expected, there are more motifs in the centre of the kilims (303 tags, 73.19%) than in the borders (111 tags, 26.81%), suggesting that the central section is predominantly where artistic expression takes place, whereas the borders have a secondary, framing function.

Additionally, due to simplicity in weaving, geometric and abstract motifs 184 tags (45.89%), are the most common motif type, followed by animal motifs (123 tags, 28.74%), plant motifs (79 tags, 18.60%), and human motifs (28 tags, 6.76%). This suggests that as motifs shift from abstract and geometric forms to more realistic shapes, their frequency decreases, likely due to the complexity in weaving these shapes. The research data also shows that in thematic domains, motifs related to “Spiritual and Divine” themes dominate (133 tags, 32.13%), reflecting weavers’ particular interest and appreciation of such motifs, indicating cultural focus on divine and supernatural themes.

Motifs symbolising “Life and Nature” (108 tags, 26.07%) are also significant, highlighting the weavers’ connection to the natural world. It is worth mentioning that most motifs related to this domain are rain-seeking motifs, which have special meaning considering that Iran is mainly a dry, low-rainfall climate. Themes associated with “Protection and Power” account for 79 tags (18.06%), while “Cultural Identity and Social Values” represents the fewest motifs with only 41 tags (9.89%). Overall, from the distribution of motifs on Iranian kilims in different regions, it can be concluded that both the weavers’ focus and the public’s interest were directed towards divine and supernatural themes, highlighting the importance of religion and its symbols, which are reflected in kilim motifs and patterns.

4.3.3 Distribution of Motifs on Serbian Kilims

Unlike Iran, where kilim samples were selected from various regions, Serbia’s primary and most significant centre of kilim weaving is in the city of Pirot, located in the southeast of the country. All one hundred selected samples were chosen from this region. Table 18 shows the distribution of motifs tags in Serbian kilims.

Table 18. Distribution of Motifs Tags in Serbian Kilims

| Region | Sample Kilims | Motif Tags |
|---------------|---------------|------------|
| Serbia, Pirot | 100 | 414 |

Based on the research motif tags (3.5), the collected sampled Serbian kilims were then categorised into three groupings: (1) Motif Placement, distinguishing motifs located on the borders or the centre (body) of the kilims; (2) Motif Types, including geometric and abstract motifs, animal motifs, plant motifs, and human motifs; and (3) Thematic Domains, representing motifs related to the Spirituality and Divine, Fertility and Renewal, Life and Nature, Protection and Power, Cultural Identity and Social Values, which will be reviewed separately as follows:

4.3.3.1 Motif Placement in Serbian Kilims

According to the database statistics, most of the motifs are placed in the central section of the kilim (337 motifs or 81.41%), while only 77 motifs (18.59%) are in the border. This distribution indicates that the central part of the kilims, the kilim centre, serves as the primary space for presenting the artistic and symbolic motifs, while the borders are more decorative and secondary. Diagram 4 shows the distribution of motif placement in Serbian kilims.

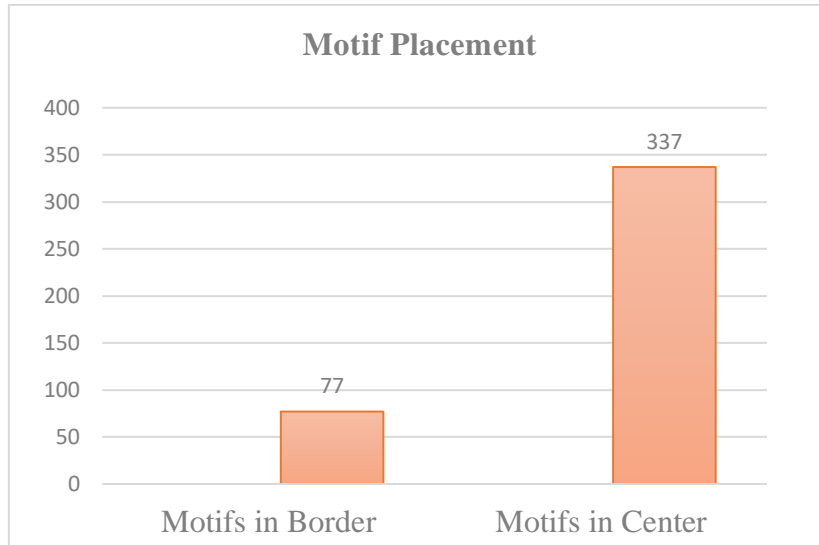


Diagram 4. Distribution of Motif Placement in Serbian kilims

4.3.3.2

In terms of motif types, geometric and abstract motifs take precedence in Serbian kilim designs, with 225 motif tags out of 414 tags, or 54.32%. These motifs, which are characterized by simplicity and strong cultural symbolism, reflect the preference of Serbian weavers for weaving designs that are not too complicated but still expressive and deeply symbolic. The second type of forms are plant motifs with 101 tags, or 24.40% of the whole motifs, reflecting the admiration for nature and its symbolic significance in the cultural context of the region. Animal motifs account for 68 motifs (16.43%), which indicate the importance of these types of motifs and their connotative and symbolic meaning for the weavers. Finally, human motifs, which are the smallest and include as few as 20 identified motifs (4.83%). This directly indicates that these types of motifs are not as common in the design of Serbian kilims.

Diagram 5 illustrates the distribution of motif types in Serbian kilims, emphasising the dominance of geometric and abstract motifs. These are followed by animal and plant motifs, while human motifs ranked as the least common motifs in Serbian kilim motifs.

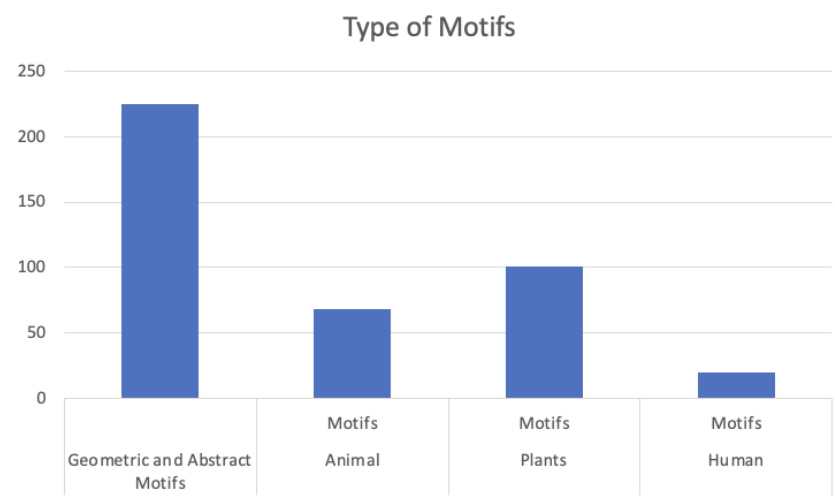


Diagram 5. Distribution of Motif Types in Serbian kilims

4.3.3.3 Motifs Thematic Domains in Serbian Kilims

In the thematic classification of Serbian kilim motifs, the most prominent domain is related to “Cultural Identity and Social Values” 153 motifs (36.88%). This emphasises the importance of traditions and socio-cultural values in this region. Kilims with motifs of “Protection and Power” are given 113 motifs (27.30%), reflecting a strong tradition of using kilim designs as talismans or symbols of safety and strength. Motifs of “Spirituality and the Divine” were found in the database with a frequency of 67 motifs (16.18%), representing religious or supernatural themes. Motif domains of “Fertility and Renewal” 59 motifs (12.24%,) and “Life and Nature” 22 motifs (5.31%,) follow in frequency. They represent the weavers’ interest in motifs related to life cycles, agricultural traditions, and the natural world. Diagram 6 Presentation of motif thematic domains in Serbian kilims.

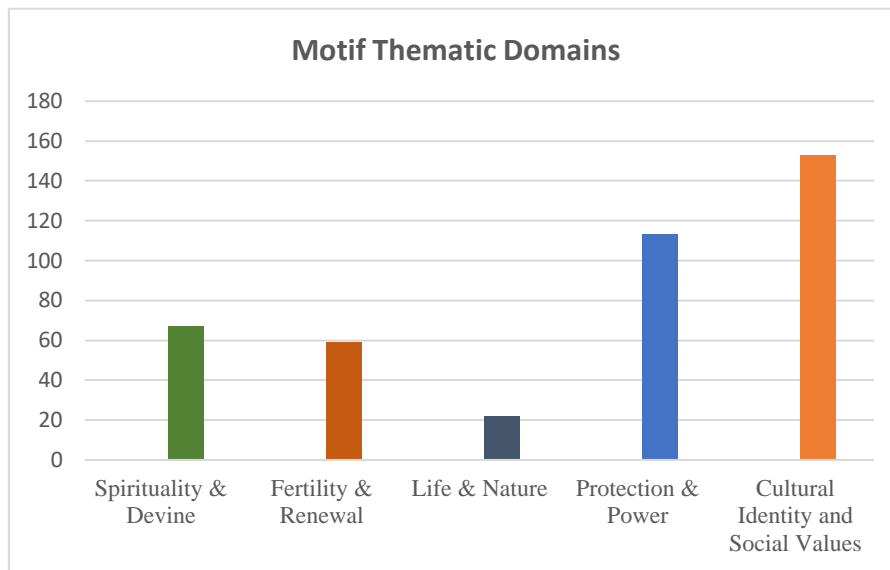


Diagram 6. Distribution of Motif Thematic Domains in Serbian kilims

Table 19 provides a comprehensive overview of the distribution of 414 motif tags from Serbian kilims within the research database. It reviews the classifications and shows the statistics of the motif tag distributions based on their placement, types, and thematic domains. This classification offers valuable insights into their forms and cultural-symbolic meanings.

Table 19. Distribution of Motif Tags in Serbian Kilims

| Motif Placement | | Motif Type | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Motif in Border | Motif in Centre | Geometric and Abstract Motifs | Animal Motifs | Plants Motifs | Human Motifs |
| 77 | 337 | 225 | 68 | 101 | 20 |
| 18.59% | 81.41% | 54.32% | 16.43% | 24.40% | 4.83% |
| Motifs Thematic Domains | | | | | |
| Spirituality and Divine | Fertility and Renewal | Life and Nature | Protection and Power | Cultural Identity and Social Values | |
| 67 | 59 | 22 | 113 | 153 | |
| 16.18% | 12.24% | 5.31% | 27.30% | 36.88% | |

4.3.4 Description and Analysis of Data for Serbian Kilims

Analysing data and the distribution of motifs in Serbian kilims provides a meaningful understanding of their forms and symbolic meanings. In contrast to Iran, where kilim weaving is widespread across various regions (2.3), Serbia's tradition is largely limited to the southeastern city of Pirot, which is recognised nationally and internationally. As a result, all of the 100 samples analysed in this research originate from this southeastern region which is identified by the name of this city. Regarding the placement of motifs, as expected, similar to Iranian kilims, most motifs are present in the centre 337 tags (81.41%), while only 77 tags (18.59%) are present in the borders. This implies that the central part is the main artistic expression, and the border motifs have a secondary, framing role. In terms of motif types, the geometric and abstract motifs represent most of the total tags, which is 225 motifs (54.32%), as such motifs would be easier to weave. The type of plant motifs comes next with 101 motifs (24.40%), and since Serbia is surrounded by generous and fertile nature and natural elements, including trees and flowers, are abundant, the high frequency of these motifs in this region is justifiable.

The frequency of animal motif tags is 68 motifs (16.43%), which suggests that Serbian weavers found inspiration from their nature, likely influenced by their agricultural and rural lifestyles. The fewest motif tags are for human motifs, with only 20 motifs (4.83%). In the classifications of thematic domains of motifs in Serbian kilims, cultural identity and social values are the most frequent, with 153 tags (36.88%) of the total 414 motifs dedicated to this theme. This shows that, for Serbian weavers, cultural heritage, communal identity, and national values are of top importance, which is reflected through motifs on the kilims. Themes of protection and power represent 113 tags (27.30%), which emphasises the belief in the protective and talismanic qualities of these symbols and reflects a belief in the efficacy of these symbols to keep away evil or bring good fortune. Motifs associated with spirituality and the divine themes comprise 67 tags (16.18%), pointing towards the role of religious and celestial

themes in Serbian kilim art. Fertility and renewal motifs 59 tags (12.24%) highlight the weavers' relationship with life cycles and fertility, while motifs indicating life and nature represent 22 tags (5.31%), showing the connection between the natural environment and the designs of kilims. In conclusion, the motifs in Serbian kilims primarily represent cultural identity and social values, and also motifs of protection against evil and talismans were seen as particularly significant to weavers.

4.4 Qualitative Analysis Findings

This section provides a comprehensive qualitative research data analysis, exploring the motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims. The study closely analyses the most common motifs, their origins, and their meanings through historical, cultural, and mythological viewpoint, ultimately placing them within the semiotic framework of analysis. From a historical perspective, it illustrates how these motifs have emerged over time and in various cultural, social, and economic contexts. It includes a review of the impact of different eras and includes an examination of the influences of various historical periods, such as the pre-Islamic, Islamic, and post-Islamic eras in Iran, as well as the impacts of Byzantine and Ottoman traditions in Serbia. Thus, the study reveals how these motifs have evolved and reflect the socio-cultural contexts from which they originated. From a mythological perspective, the motifs are analysed for their symbolic meanings and connections to ancient beliefs, traditions, and customs. This analysis seeks to uncover the meaning of complex spiritual or protective motifs connected to nature, deities, and cosmic elements. These symbolic elements highlight the role of motifs as carriers of sacred and mythical stories and make the kilims a medium of spiritual meaning beyond mere decoration. All of these three perspectives (historical, cultural, and mythological) are brought together under the semiotic analysis, which assumes, at its most basic level, that motifs are signs that represent deeper meanings through their visual elements. Therefore, the analysis includes studying the connotative meaning of motifs as well as form, colours, and design to decode the messages they convey. The semiotic approach for analysing the motifs offers a deeper understanding of how visual elements reflect cultural and symbolic meanings within broader artistic and social contexts. Through this qualitative analysis, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of their symbolic meaning in Iranian and Serbian kilims, emphasising their historical, cultural, and mythological significance and their role in preserving the intangible heritage of both regions.

4.4.1 Semiotic Analysis of Iranian Kilim Motifs

Based on the database report, the most significant recurring motifs in Iranian kilims are Bird's head, Star, Water, Toranj (Medallion), Ram, Peacock, Lion, Snake, and Chalipa (Cross). These motifs are deeply rooted in the cultural and artistic traditions of Iran, each carrying symbolic meanings and reflecting the specific cultural aspects of regions, including their historical, mythological, and spiritual heritage. This also emphasises the role of figurative motifs in preserving and expressing cultural narratives and values throughout history and generations. In the next sections, each motif is explored in detail, with attention to its symbolic meanings, cultural importance, and artistic representation.

4.4.1.1 Motif of Indo-Iranian Chalipa (Swastika)

Various Iranian tribes and clans trace their origins to a common ancestry. Historians refer to this early group as the ancient Iranians. The ancestors of the ancient Iranians coexisted with other related ethnic groups in a unified land in ancient times. Collectively, these peoples are

known as Indo-European, a term derived from their migration to various regions of Europe and Asia, including Iran and India (Indo-Iranian). According to historical evidences, the Indo-European peoples lived in their common homeland until 3rd millennium B.C. However, for reasons that remain unclear, they were compelled to migrate. Along the way, different groups separated and dispersed across regions from India to Europe. Indians and Iranians were more closely related to each other than to other Indo-European branches, and their separation occurred much later. Their shared mythological heritage, beliefs, customs, and the striking similarity between ancient Iranian and Indian languages reflect this close connection. Interestingly, both Iranians and Indians referred to themselves as “Arya” (Bagheri, 2006, pp, 13-17).

Although the “Cross” motif may initially appear similar to the Christian cross, its origins date back thousands of years before Christianity. Deeply rooted in ancient religions such as Zoroastrianism and early Iranian traditions, this symbol was historically linked to rituals and beliefs of Mithraism in Iran and India rather than Christianity. In some contexts, it is also referred to as the “Aryan Cross.” According to Ghaem (2010, p. 36), among ancient civilizations, Chalipa was a symbol of hidden forces in nature and divine powers. The earliest known appearance of the Chalipa symbol, resembling a + sign, was found on pottery in the Khuzestan region, dating back to around 5000 B.C. Similarly, according to John (1941), as cited in Freed and Freed, (1980, p. 89), the earliest recorded occurrences of the swastika seem to have been at Samarra in central Mesopotamia and at Susa in western Iran, where clear swastikas appear on pottery from about 4000 B.C. Before the emergence of Zoroastrianism, the Aryans practiced Mehrism or Mithraism as their primary belief system. This religion emphasised solar worship, reflecting the sun’s vital role, and its symbols often included imagery reminiscent of a crucifix. According to Ludwig Müller, the Aryans used this sign, a symbol of the sun, even before their historical dispersion, which explains its widespread presence in countries where Indo-European peoples settled. Therefore, its origin traces back to the original homeland of the Aryans (as cited in Zakerin, 2011).

The Chalipa symbol is closely associated with solar and reproductive motifs, such as lions, horses, deer, and cedar trees. It universally represents good fortune, well-being, blessings, longevity, fertility, health, and life, carrying profound mystical and celestial significance. Evidence from prehistoric graves and sites dedicated to the worship of Mithra (Mehr) shows that these symbols often face the sun, signifying a plea for divine support and forgiveness from the celestial god (Zakerin, 2011, p. 26). According to Bakhturtash (2001), “the Chalipa symbolises the connection between the sun, the moon, and the four elements, water, wind, fire, and earth, which sustain existence and contribute to the creation of the world and humanity. The intermingling of these four elements is seen as the driving force behind the wheel of creation, ensuring the stability and continuity of existence sets the wheel of creation in motion and sustains the order of existence” (Bakhturtash, 2001, p. 58). Rezaei (2013, p. 100) indicates that Chalipa is a symbol representing the four corners of the world and embodies the concept of the universe as “great peace,” brotherhood, and unity among nations. In the Mehr ritual (Mithraism), it signifies that people from every corner of the world should be united in friendship and that total peace should prevail globally.

According to Ghaem (2010), regarding Mehr, or Mitra, and his emphasis on light and the eradication of darkness, other scholars share a similar perspective. Mehr is portrayed as traveling across the world, spreading light and justice while confronting liars and oath-breakers. He commands a symbol of agility and bravery: a long-wheeled, swift-moving chariot drawn by four spirited horses, sustained by divine nourishment. In this tradition, the chariot is known as the “wheel of Mehr” (Ghaem, 2010, p. 37). Zakerin (2011, pp. 25-26) indicates that in Iran, the image of Chalipa appears in numerous mosques and places of worship, often alongside the names of Allah, Muhammad, and Ali.

In India, this motif is referred to as the Swastika. According to Hangeldian, as cited in Afrough (2014, p. 141), this term in Sanskrit consists of two parts meaning “good” and “to be,” along with a diminutive suffix “-ka,” and together, it means “good fortune”. Therefore, for the tribe carrying this symbol with them, it brought auspiciousness and good fortune. The swastika appears in two forms: one turning to the right and the other to the left, each carrying different connotations. The left-turning swastika is associated with misfortune, while the right-turning swastika symbolises happiness and prosperity. Three such swastikas are carved at the head of the Shiva temple, and another is engraved on a pillar in the Lakshmi Narayan temple, dedicated to the goddess of wealth, in Delhi. The cross is regarded as a symbol of the Hindu sun, representing forgiveness and blessing. It conveys the idea that although the maze of life can be confusing, light will always find its way through (Bakhturtash, 2001, p. 96).

4.4.1.2 Motif of Star

The frequent star motif on Iranian kilims appears both individually and in two forms, five-pointed and eight-pointed, generally representing the concept of light. According to Nozhat (2009, p. 156), “Broad and deep mystical concepts can only be presented and understood through a symbolic language. One of these symbols is light, with stars and heavenly bodies serving as its signs. The symbol of “light” has played a fundamental role for many centuries in most religious beliefs, representing the nature of supreme truth.” The concept of light is one of the main symbols in various religions. In Islam, God refers to Himself as light in the Holy Qur’an (Surah An-Nur, Verse 35). Even before the advent of Islam, light held a significant place among Iranians. Mehr, the great Aryan god symbolising the light of the sun, was appreciated as the helper of true warriors and the god of covenants. After the migration of the Aryans to Iran and India, Mehr continued to hold a special place in their beliefs. In India, along with other gods, Mehr or Mithra was highly respected and held a prominent position. From that time and later in the Zoroastrian religion in Iran, many symbols associated with Mehr and light were considered valuable. Symbols like the Chalipa, the star, and other motifs related to light were particularly esteemed and respected by the Iranians.

4.4.1.3 Five-Pointed Star

Besides the symbolic meaning of the star itself, the number of points on a star is also crucial for interpreting its symbolic significance. Throughout human history, numbers have always played a significant role. In Iranian and Zoroastrian cultures, numbers have held special and meaningful significance. Numbers such as 3, 5, 7, 12, and 30 were considered sacred. In Zoroastrianism, there are five daily prayers, and similarly, in Islam, the number five is also considered sacred. According to Schimmel (1993, p. 119), “In Islam, the number 5 holds great significance. In addition to the Five Pillars of Faith—profession of faith, ritual prayer, fasting during the month of Ramadan, almsgiving, and pilgrimage to Mecca—Muslims perform ritual prayers five times a day. Islamic law also categorizes actions into five classifications: obligatory, recommended, neutral, discouraged, and prohibited. During wartime, war booty is divided into five parts. Additionally, there is the concept of Panj-Tan, referring to the five members of Prophet Muhammad’s household who were taken under his cloak and whose names are inscribed in amulets. In Indian Islam, another significant group is the panj piriya, five mysterious saintly figures who are invoked for spiritual aid. The Shiite fraternity of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa) in tenth-century Basra explicitly stated that Islam is fundamentally structured around the number five—not only because of the Five Pillars and the panjtan but also because there are precisely five law-giving prophets: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Moreover, among the cryptic muqatta‘at letters found at the beginning

of several Quranic chapters, no sequence exceeds five letters”. Accordingly, the five-pointed star motif seen on Iranian regional kilims can be analysed within this interpretative framework.

4.4.1.4 Eight-Pointed Star

The eight-pointed star is a motif frequently found in the stone inscriptions of the 5th and 6th centuries, later becoming known as the “Rosette” in Islamic art. This star motif evolved from the shapes of a circle, chalipa, and star, representing the sun in various artistic contexts across different periods and regions, each with its unique meaning. The number eight has long been considered a symbolic number of the sun across Europe, Asia, and Africa (Ranjbar *et al.*, 2019, p. 70). According to Emami (2002, p. 63), “in Islam, the number eight is associated with various expressions, such as the *Eight Heavens* and the *Eight Doors of Heaven*, with the eighth door representing the door of repentance, which is always open in mystical traditions.” In Zoroastrianism, the number eight was considered auspicious; eight-pointed columns and eight-sided porches were used in the construction of fire temples, on the other hand, the most sacred site for Muslims, the Kaaba, is in the shape of a cube, and the first number associated with a cube is eight. The significance of the number eight can also be traced back to pre-Islamic times; in ancient Iran, the goddess of water is depicted wearing a crown with eight feathers (Ranjbar *et al.*, 2019, p. 70).

4.4.1.5 Motifs of Rain and Water

The importance of the rain and water motif, frequently found in Iranian kilims, is primarily due to the people’s reliance on water for agriculture, as Iran has a dry and semi-desert climate. Apart from the Caspian Sea region in northern Iran, the country is generally arid, with limited water resources and frequent droughts. This has made water and rain crucial elements in Iranian culture since ancient times. Soil fertility and plant growth have long been central concerns for the people, as their survival depended on the fertility of the land, which, in turn, relied on water and rain. Consequently, symbols related to water and rain, ranging from astronomical shapes and constellations to rain-calling spells, have always played a key role in the lives of Iranians. The importance of water and the need for rain led the people of Iran to use magic and symbols related to rainfall to try to influence nature. These symbols, found on monuments from before the Christian era, carry deep meanings. For instance, pottery related to water, such as cups, bowls, and jugs, discovered from the second half of the 4th millennium B.C. in Susa is decorated with patterns representing water, rain, and “living water.”

According to Phyllis Ackerman as cited in Afrough (2014, p. 137), “Prehistoric potters of Iran painted flocks of birds to symbolize clouds in relation to magical religious rituals for bringing rain. Among prehistoric pottery, the ceramic piece obtained from Tepe Giyan in Nahavand is more expressive and eloquent than similar designs, as it clearly depicts the relationship between the bird and the cloud, with rain pouring down from the extension of their heads and necks”.

Parham (1999) also indicates that, in the mythology of that time, the moon was seen as a “heavenly reservoir,” providing water and moisture to counter the sun’s heat. The mountain goat, with its crescent-shaped horns, symbolised the moon and water, while chickens and birds represented clouds and rain. During this period, the practice of magic and sorcery often involved the repeated use of symbols connected to water and rain. A clear example of this is the depiction of birds arranged in rain-like patterns on pottery. This imagery appears on

artifacts from various sites, including Susa¹⁰, *Tall-e Bakun in Marvdasht*¹¹, the hills of Giyanin Nahavand¹², and Sialk Archeological Hills in Kashan¹³, where rain is symbolised by parallel lines.

In another stage of rain-seeking magic, the symbolism changes to focus on certain animal features, making them larger while reducing or even omitting other parts. For instance, the horns of the ibex in Susa and the ram in Marvdasht are made disproportionately large, while the bodies of the animals become thin or even just dots. This practice, called “dismemberment” or “immobilization,” often involves enlarging one feature, like horns, while removing main parts like the head. Rather than showing decay, this technique is thought to increase the image’s strength and magical power. Sometimes, only a simple geometric shape, like a triangular head and neck, is left, barely recognizable as a bird or animal. This new symbolic style, seen in the pottery of Marvdasht and Persepolis, creates a visual illusion where each bird’s head transforms into another bird, using cleverly arranged positive and negative spaces that are partially hidden. This “hidden” style of magical painting represents a significant development in prehistoric pottery and later becomes essential in carpet weaving. Concealing “talismans” and “charms” from “strangers” and “unskilled” individuals is a key feature of magical painting, designed to enhance its power and effectiveness. The earliest symbols for water and rain were simple, like straight or broken parallel lines, which have been used to represent water since prehistoric times in Iran and Mesopotamia, dating back to the earliest Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations. This straightforward method of symbolization directly illustrated wavy water without any mythological meaning. Similarly, black-and-white checkered patterns representing the reflection of water were used to decorate pottery across various regions by the end of the fourth millennium, from Susa to Tall-e Bakun in Marvdasht, Sialk in Kashan, Gyan Hill in Nahavand, and Hesar Hill in Damghan. Rain was also represented by comb-like parallel lines, often shown alongside birds, on the arms of four-part designs, and together with moon symbols. These early, simple symbols depicted water and rain in a geometric and direct way, with an abstract quality that was immediately recognizable. The next stage is similar to the first, where various objects and living beings are transformed into symbols of water and rain. For example, continuous triangles representing mountains are shown as the source and keeper of the earth’s waters, a dual symbolism that enhances their magical power. In this stage, the tree, growing from life-giving waters, symbolises soil fertility and evolves to represent all existence, becoming the “tree of life” or “sacred tree.” From these mythological connections, birds, mountain goats, and hornbills with rain-shaped crests also become symbols of water (Parham, 1999, pp 40-47).

4.4.1.6 Motif of Ram

The ram’s horns motif is one of the most widely used and frequently repeated motifs found in Iranian kilims, with a long ancient history. According to Pope (2001), as cited in Afzaltousi, (2012, 59), the role of horned animals is a recurring theme in Iranian art. These

¹⁰ Susa was an ancient city located in the lower Zagros Mountains, about 250 kilometers east of the Tigris River, between the Karkheh and Dez Rivers in present-day Iran. It is one of the oldest known settlements in the world, likely founded around 4000 BCE, although evidence of a village settlement dates back to 7000 BCE.

¹¹ Tall-e Bakun (Tape Bakun), near Persepolis in the Mavdasht plain of Fars, is a key prehistoric site known for its rich finds and being the first large-scale excavation in the region.

¹² Giyan Hill (Tape Giyan), located in west of Nahavand city, dates back to the 4th to 1st millennium BC. Nahavand is a city in the western part of Iran, situated in the province of Hamadan.

¹³ Sialk Hill (Tape Sialk), situated in a suburb of Kashan in Isfahan Province, central Iran, near Fin Garden, is an ancient archaeological site dating back to approximately 6000–5500 BC. This site is linked to the Zayandeh River Culture, highlighting its significance as one of the earliest known settlements in the region.

animals, significant for their association with fertility, also held importance in religious practices and witchcraft. Among them, the ram's horn has been seen as a source of creation and a symbol of light, as evidenced by numerous sculptures of rams found in Marlik. (Pope, 2001 p. 15). In pottery from Sialk and Marlik, the symbol of a goat or ram's horn appears frequently. It symbolises not only masculinity and fertility but also a plea for rain, reflecting the dependency of the earth's fertility on water. The horn, resembling the crescent moon, serves as a symbol of both the moon and water (Parham, 1999). According to Dehkhoda (1994, Vol. 6, p. 8084), in Iranian culture, the ram is the symbol of the first solar month, known as Aries. It is described that this month takes the form of a ram, and the day when the sun enters this month is Nowruz. Nowruz marks the first day of the new year in Iranian culture, so the ram symbolises the dawn of a new era. The ram motif not only has a historical background in ancient Iran but also in other civilizations. According to Ghorbani Gimbutas (1989) as cited in Ghahfarokhi *et al.* (2018), during the Neolithic period, several developments took place, including the growing significance of the ram as a domesticated animal in people's lives. This was followed by advancements in weaving and spinning. Since then, the ram and ram's horns became prominent motifs in Neolithic pottery, especially in Anatolia and Greece. The ram's essential role in people's lives and these subsequent developments led to the ram becoming an enduring symbol in weaving and spinning (Gimbutas, 1989, pp. 57, 97).

4.4.1.7 Motif of Bird (Kall-e Morghi)

In general, motif of the bird's head and the bird itself in Iranian kilims represent clouds and rain. According to Afrough (2014, p. 133), this motif became more prominent during the Sassanid era, reflecting the enduring connection between birds and the call for rain from the sky in Iranian culture. The bird head or chicken pattern is also a symbol of soil fertility and is often depicted alongside a tree, representing the Tree of Life. When this motif appears around water ponds, forming the Toranj motif, it signifies a plea for rain. This pattern is also found in the carpets and kilims of other regions, such as the Caucasus and Afghanistan, which have historically been part of the Iranian Plateau. Pottery dating back 6,000 years has been discovered in Marvdasht, Iran, featuring symbols of chicken heads or chickens. This symbol is distinctly Iranian and is sometimes depicted as a chain of chickens or a chain of chicken heads, representing abundance in unity (Parham, 1976). According to Mansuri (2013), the depiction of birds and chickens in Iranian art has a deep-rooted history, fundamentally originating from Iranian culture. The enduring relationship between humans and birds is evident across various artistic fields throughout the evolution of human society, including wall paintings, pottery designs, traditional and folk art, carpet motifs, handicrafts, and various literary works. From ancient times to the present day, humans have used the metaphor of birds and their motifs to express many of their thoughts (Mansuri, 2013, p. 3). According to Shabani Khatib (2008, p. 75), in a rock painting in the Hamian area of Lorestan, the earliest depiction of a bird in Iranian history can be seen. This image, created by tribes from the Paleolithic period, portrays people who hunted and gathered roots and leaves for food. Furthermore, the presence of bird motifs in pottery from the Sialk hills of Susa, Marvdasht, and other locations demonstrates that the role of birds has been consistently significant throughout Iranian history.

The motif of chickens, birds, and other simplified shapes appear to have spread to various parts of the world over time. Historical pottery findings suggest that this pattern has Iranian origins, used long before the arrival of Islam to Persia and even predating the Zoroastrian period, dating back to when Iranians worshiped Mehr or Mitra. On the other hand, the interconnected chain of birds not only represents the unity of various elements but also creates a two-layer pattern. By arranging these bird motifs in opposite directions, another image of the same size and shape, but in a different colour, emerges. This pattern may carry a symbolic or

mystical significance, potentially linked to the use of magical power and spell craft to conquer and control natural forces. Repetition is believed to be a driving force of magic, providing the magical forces with power and movement.

4.4.1.8 Motif of Toranj

In Persian art, the Toranj is a prominent element that serves as a central motif in works such as kilims, carpets, and tiles. This motif can be either geometric or non-geometric but falls under the category of plant motifs. In this research, it is classified as a “Garden Pond” within the thematic domain of Spirituality and the Divine, representing spirituality.

Dehkhoda Dictionary defines *Toranj* as “a large circular or multi-petaled flower pattern located at the centre of a carpet” (Dehkhoda, 1998, p. 6675). It can also refer to bergamot, a citrus fruit with an oval shape, elongated on both sides. The exact origin and initial form of the *Toranj* design remain unclear. Some suggest it represents the motif of a pond, which, with changes in pond architecture, evolved into rhombus, six-cornered, or eight-cornered shapes (Parham, 1985, p. 86). Other researchers believe it resembles the bergamot fruit, which holds special significance in Muslim culture. Additionally, some consider it to be a modified form of the Aryan sun swastika motif used in pre-Islamic times (Azarpad & Hashmati Razavi, 1994, p. 137). In Persian carpet weaving, the *Toranj* has traditionally symbolised a pond or water tank. A common design of the *Toranj* draws inspiration from the layout of traditional Iranian houses, representing the space around the central pond in a four-garden arrangement.

According to Afrugh (2014, pp. 100-101) “in the oldest examples of carpets with fringes, the fringes are woven in a square shape, mirroring the original shape of the pond. However, from the end of the Timurid era, fringes began to be woven in circular and polygonal shapes, reflecting the evolving architectural forms of ponds. The primary model of this pattern is the concept of *Firdaus* (the garden of heaven), which is rooted in the mythical place of religious life within the realm of human conscience. It originates from the depiction of the first garden of heaven. Religious life, in its connection with human conscience, emphasises promoting good, achieving conscientious happiness, and encouraging individuals to avoid evil and pursue good. The idea of the reward for good deeds and punishment for actions, even in ancient religions like those of Egypt and Mesopotamia, reflects a commitment to virtuous actions and the prevention of evil behaviour”. The mythical story of the garden of heaven, or *Toranj*, continues to play a distinctive role in Iranian woven rugs, such as kilims, often depicted as a basin filled with water at the centre of the rug. A pond adorned with animal and plant motifs inside or around it symbolises the atmosphere of Paradise and embodies its blessings. Over time, the dynamic and creative mind of the carpet weaver has led to partial or total changes in this motif, adapting its elements to enhance the design and its representation of beauty. *Toranj* is one of the original Iranian motifs, used since ancient times, even before the arrival of Islam, in the design and decoration of many works of art, such as carpets, architectural elements, and more. This motif has undergone numerous changes over different periods. *Toranj* is a comprehensive representation of humanity’s journey toward God, encompassing multiple meanings and deeply rooted in religious beliefs. According to Mirza Amini (2011, p. 10), “the *Toranj* motif emerged from mythical and symbolic beliefs related to heaven, but its evolution into its present form reflects the mindset and aspirations of the Iranian artist in expressing the Garden of Heaven and a spiritual space.”

Toranj, generally known as “The pond,” is described by Cooper (2000, p. 70) as one of the luminous symbols representing the intersection of the sky, the earth, and the underworld through its waters. It signifies life in the earthly realm, the boiling and eruption from the depths of darkness toward light, and the rising of water, mirroring humanity’s journey toward clarity and flow. It is both a symbol of being rooted in the soil and connected to the sky, much like its

reflection in the carpet, serving as a mirror to the infinite sky or the heavenly gardens. The pond has acquired such meanings not in itself but because it holds water, becoming a vessel for these imaginative concepts. As a sign of the presence of water and prosperity, the pond is a recurring element in the architecture of temples and mosques, in gardens, and throughout flowing Iranian art, symbolising water. In pre-Islamic rituals and cults in Iran, water has always held a significant and powerful presence. Springs, wells, wetlands, and ponds are considered inseparable parts of the places of worship in the Mithraic (Mehr) religion. This symbolism of water in places of worship continues into Islamic architecture and practices.

According to Serlo (2009, pp. 315-317), through an extensive exploration of the symbolism of spring and fountain and its connection with alchemy, Jung concluded that the spring symbolises or reflects the soul, the source of inner life and spiritual forces. Jung also associates this symbol with the lands of childhood and the realm of unconscious impulses, indicating that the need for this source arises when human life is denied or forgotten. His interpretation is particularly relevant when a fountain is placed at the centre of a garden; in this context, the central location represents the human soul or individuality. Therefore, the central pond or *Toranj* serves as a manifestation of the human soul, distinct from the surrounding text of the carpet in the centre of the garden.

4.4.1.9 Motif of Snake

Snake (serpent) motifs and symbols have been discovered on pottery from early times in Iran. This symbol is also evident in the civilization of Elam, where it held a sacred status among Iranians. According to Hinz (1992, pp. 47-48), “the pottery of the 3rd and 4th millennia is adorned with intricate snake patterns. Snakes are depicted on the lids of jars and containers, symbolising protection against evil forces, while carved snakes coil and climb over doors, serving as guardians of the gates. On carved patterns of kings and creepers around altar vessels, snakes are fashioned into tools such as sceptres and royal staffs, forming the thrones of rulers in a standing spiral shape. The symbol of the snake, seen around the tree of life in Elam and as a fertility emblem featuring two mating snakes, eventually spread to Egypt. Snakes with human heads further underscore the divine aspect of this reptile.” In Susa, dated to the fourth millennium B.C., a goddess figure is depicted wearing a dress adorned with water symbols, holding two snakes in her hands (Rafifar & Malek, 2013, p.15). According to Dehkhoda (1998), in Iran, after the arrival of the Aryans, the place and significance of the snake changed. The snake, a long and clumsy reptile, was referred to as *Maire* in Avestan Persian and *Mare* in Sanskrit, both of which appear to share the same root, meaning “to die.” In Zoroastrianism, one of the conditions for repentance and forgiveness for major sins involves killing a snake. The Avesta also describes a character named Azhi Dahak (Azhdahak), symbolised by two snakes on his shoulders, who is portrayed as a demonic figure. The name “Azhi Dahak” combines “Azhi,” meaning snake, and “Ak,” meaning flaw (Seddigian, 1996, p. 128). In Islamic belief, the snake was once a beautiful creature with four legs, similar to a camel, and was considered one of the treasurers of heaven. However, it cooperated with the devil in seducing Adam, leading to its punishment by God. As a result, the snake was expelled from heaven, condemned to crawl on its belly and eat dirt, with a decree that people should strike its head (Mohseni & Dadvar, 2014, p. 23).

One of the most prominent representations of the snake in Iranian carpets and kilims is its depiction next to the tree of life, a motif structurally similar to examples from pre-Islamic Iran. The placement of the snake beside the tree carries a special meaning; in pre-Islamic Iran, the snake symbolised blessings and the increase of prosperity. In ancient myths, the cosmic tree is often portrayed as a significant tree on top of a mountain, serving as the world’s axis, with a dragon or snake coiled around it. This snake frequently represents the suffering that one must

endure to gain knowledge or attain immortality (Pourkhaleghi, 2001, p. 104). According to Habibi (2001, p. 119), the snake is associated with a range of symbolic meanings, including masculinity, unfaithfulness, filthiness, cunning, and betrayal. It also symbolizes the evil aspects of reason and opposing forces. In ethnic and mythological beliefs, the snake represents earthly gods, signifies prosperity, and acts as a messenger of divine messages.

4.4.2 Semiotic Analysis of Serbian Kilim Motifs

This section explores the most prominent and frequently used motifs in Serbian kilims and analyses their symbolic, connotative meanings and cultural significance. According to the research corpus's statistics, the most frequent motifs in Serbian kilims are the "Devil's Knee," "Turtle," "Sofra," "Rose," "Tree," "Lion Paw," and "German Box." Each motif has distinct semiotic and cultural meanings, which can reflect the interaction between tradition, cultural identity, and regional heritage. The frequent use and repetition of these motifs in Serbian kilims emphasise their importance as both aesthetic and symbolic elements. They also highlight how they carry shared narratives and values within Serbian kilim weaving traditions.

4.4.2.1 Motif Devil's Knee

According to Živadinović (2022, p. 83), "The pattern known as the Devil's Knee (*vraško koleno*) is one of the oldest symbols in pre-Christian Slavic mythology and remains a favored motif on kilims to this day. The symbol, depicting the Sun with eight arms, was known as *kolovrat* and represented the continuous flow of life, an endless cycle of birth and death, and the constant movement in Nature. The *kolo* or *okretanje* (movement in circles) was an important worship custom for our ancestors and remains a popular folk dance in Serbia. It was believed that 'the more kolo circles there were, the more blessings and crops in the field, and greater luck in battle. This ornament is thought to provide strength, fearlessness, bravery, and luck in battle, while also serving as a protection against evil. Kilims featuring the Devil's Knee pattern are often presented as wedding gifts, most commonly within a composition named *wreaths*." The connection of this motif with the sun is significant, which could be related to myths. Since the sun symbol was significant in many ancient cultures and due to its connection with the motif of the *vraško koleno* some of the background of this symbol will be examined as follows: The sun was directly related to agriculture and the change of seasons. In almost all ancient civilizations, including Iran, India, Egypt, Mesopotamia and China, the sun god was praised. In general, the sun is a symbol of eternal life, new life. In the mythology of ancient Iran, after the popularization of Zoroastrianism and the changes in human life, the sun and the moon appeared with different roles. The sun god in ancient Iran is one of the most renowned Zoroastrian deities called "Mitra" (Bajlan Farrokhi, 2010, 108). In Iran, the sun god appears as a judge who ensnares wrongdoers and evildoers (Bajlan Farrokhi, 2010, pp. 113-114). The symbol of sun worship, or Mithraism, is represented in the form of the *Chalipa*, or circle of the seal, which is believed to be a carrier of heavenly forces. According to Bakhturtash (2001, pp. 27, 32), the forebears of each branch of this symbol identified it with one of the four elements, believing that it preserves nature through its own rotation. Grishman (1991, p. 354) describes the sun in ancient Iran as an embodiment of the eternal life and glory of the monarchy, reflected in the crowns of kings, which were often adorned with rays of light or wings. In ancient Iranian belief, the sun was created by Ahura Mazda and has no wife or children. In India, the Sun God, known as Surya, is one of the most significant deities. Surya represents both divine majesty and the source of light, warmth, life, and knowledge. He is worshipped in temples dedicated to the sun. The Sun God in India is depicted with golden hair and a beard, with his entire being - down to the tips of his fingernails- radiating light, and his eyes are brown. In ancient India, the

survival and daily life of early humans were closely tied to the presence of the sun. In Hinduism, Surya is seen as a benefactor of humankind, symbolised by the broken cross, which represents his forgiveness (Zekrgu, 1998, pp. 64–65). In Greek mythology also the sun plays a crucial role and Helios is the god of the sun (Boardman, *et al.*, 2022, p. 941). The worship of Helios has deep roots in Greek history and was widely popular throughout the region. The motif of *vraško koleno* has similarities with the swastika (4.4.1.1), including the fact that both rotate and move from right to left, and it seems that both have roots in Indo-Iranian mythology and rituals related to the worship of the sun and fire. However, the swastika has a direct relationship with the Mithraism and divine sources. The motif of *vraško koleno*, associated with the sun in Slavic mythology, primarily refers to Slavic folklore rituals and represents protection and ward off from evil forces.

4.4.2.2 Motif of Turtle

The turtle motif, known as *željka*, is one of the most prevalent and significant motifs in Pirot kilims. According to Živadinović (2022) among the oldest and most widespread designs, *željka* has become a trademark of the Pirot kilim. Because of its importance, the coat of arms of the city of Pirot also features this motif. The turtle, according to folk belief, is a guardian of time, a symbol of durability and longevity. Its shell is believed to have magic powers that provide protection from danger, likened to the protection of a mother holding her child. This ornament acts as a talisman of reproduction, protection, happiness, and a healthy life. Because of its symbolic meaning, it is often given as a gift to convey wishes for longevity and happiness. In the centre of the turtle pattern on the Pirot kilim, there is an embedded motif of *čurlinjak* with four outstretched legs extending to the sides, resembling a turtle lying on its back as seen from above. The motif is often used in the borders around the central part of kilims (Živadinović, 2022, p. 85). This motif is similar to the fertility motifs found in Anatolian kilims, which is often depicted as an anthropomorphic figure with a hand on the waist, sometimes shown with a baby in the belly, symbolising life, birth, and the desire to give birth (Hall, 1993, p. 75).

4.4.2.3 Motif of Sofra

One of the oldest and most frequently used motifs in Serbian kilims is the star-like motif known as “Sofra”, or in its simpler form, *čurlinjak*. This motif is universal and has different names in various cultures. In Iran, it appeared on pottery thousands of years ago and is called the “diamond star.” In different regions of Iran, the motif is named after common items which it resembles, such as Samavar (a metal container used for heating and boiling water) or Sormedan (a container for black powder used as eyeliner). Despite these variations, the motif ultimately represents a star and symbolises light. According to Živadinović (2022, p. 81), “in the Serbian language, the word *sofra* has multiple meanings; it can refer to a low wooden dining table or a family gathering around a festive meal.” Velkova (2020, p. 370) also noted, “the *sofra* (dining table) motif, consisting of a series of colourful concentric lozenge shapes, is most similar to a Caucasian ornament.” This motif, used as an amulet, is believed to represent eternal life and longevity, offering protection from evil forces and bringing good luck to its bearer (Živadinović, 2022, p. 75).

4.4.2.4 Motif of Roses

The motif of the flower (the rose) in Serbian is called *Đulovi*. The origin of this term can be traced back to the Persian word “*gol*,” meaning “the flower.” This word was then adopted into Turkish, where it is pronounced as “*gul*.” The word “*đulovi*” is the plural form of “*đul*,”

and kilims featuring this motif depict the kilim field as a landscape covered in flowers. According to Živadinović (2022, p. 92), “It is a common poetic name for a rose, and it is a personification of a young woman and her beauty.” This motif carries a profound cultural and symbolic meaning, representing the beauty of nature as well as the ideal qualities of youth and femininity. “Kilim decorated with *đulovi* motifs were traditionally considered part of the dowry of females. These kilims were gifted by mothers or grandmothers, symbolising the transmission of love, protection, and familial heritage across generations” (Živadinović, 2022, p. 92). Therefore, in addition to its meaning as an aesthetic decoration, the *đulovi* motif pattern presents fertility and continuity of life in the Serbian weaving tradition. The motif’s change of name from Persian to Turkish and Serbian, along with its presence in the kilims of these three regions, indicates cultural commonalities and shared beliefs.

4.4.2.5 Motif of Tree

Plants are an example of life and a symbol of evolution. The continued growth of plants is a sign of the periodic revival of the myth of the eternal return to a single principle (De Beaucorps, 1995, p. 21). From the point of view of the primitive societies, the tree was a symbol of the life after death, resurrection and longevity, and due to its standing and rebirth it became a symbol of eternity and was considered sacred. Additionally, the rarity or abundance of trees, their role in harvests, and their importance in legends further contributed to their cultural significance. The tree is often seen as a symbol of femininity or motherhood by many cultures due to its ability to bear fruit and provide shade and protection. However, the upright trunk of the tree is considered a symbol of masculinity. In different cultures, this motif is sometimes shown with the figure of different trees, such as fig trees or other fertile trees. In kilim motifs, the tree primarily refers to the “Tree of Life” representing eternity. According to Eliade (2007, p. 358) in the myth of the tree of life, it is at the centre of the universe and links the sky, the earth, and the underworld. Eliade (2002) also asserts that the Tree of Life and the symbol of the world are alive and dynamic because they are constantly renewed, and endless life is immortal. From a broader perspective, the cosmic tree is considered the tree of life without death, eternal life expressing the concept of reality is absolute, so the tree becomes a symbol for that reality (Eliade, 2002, pp. 57-58). Stefanović (2005) indicates that, “The tree of life, symbol of eternity throughout ancient Orient.” The Tree of Life motif is also found in both regular carpets and Serbian prayer carpets, known as “*Šarkoj mirab/mirhab*”, which originates from Pirot and symbolises eternity. As Živadinović (2022, p. 133) noted, “On the Pirot kilim, the pattern is shown with a dove on the top of the tree and lots of fruit hanging from the branches. It is surrounded by rich ornamentation: birds, animals, flowers. It is often framed by a pentagonal form in the form of a *mihrab* or mirror, which indicates that it is a praying rug.”

4.4.2.6 Motif of Lion Paws

The motif of the lion has symbolised power and pride across various nations since ancient times. However, regarding the motif of the paw in Serbian kilims, according to Živadinović (2022, p. 104), “The pattern belongs to a group of very old patterns and represents the stylisation of the bones of a lion’s foot. They are always arranged symmetrically in vertical rows in several colours. The paws are represented in a way that the toes of two paws are intertwined. The pattern may cover the entire field in form of a network, while *kostenice* may also be present in the kilim border or within the mirror.” In Serbian kilims, the paws, in abstract form, create a pattern, and their placement in both the main field and border of the kilim indicates their versatility and decorative design, emphasising symmetry and repetition. The strength and nobility of this lion’s paw pattern’s symbolism is distinctly tied with the cultural

identity of the Pirot kilim's weavers and represents one of the ancient and universal patterns of the village kilim.

4.4.2.7 Motif of German Box

By creatively changing traditional decorations, such as modifying shapes, colour arrangements, or the simplicity or complexity of motifs, kilims offered new aesthetics and presented new symbolic meanings. In Serbian kilims, a frequently occurring motif, mostly found in the border, is the square box pattern, which conveys a deeper symbolic meaning beyond its nominal designation. Živadinović (2022, p. 118) indicates that “the pattern German Box has a form of a bordered square in a diagonal position, with four serrated or straight fields. It is usually shown hanging from tree branches (*na direci*) or on a wreath. It may also appear on its own, in the border around the kilim”. According to Velkova (2020, p. 32), “The symbol of love and unity, i.e., the change between day and night, turned into a German box in Pirot kilim-making.” Consequently, “German box” as a term has no historical relevance to Germany; it is thought to capture a symbolic spirit similar to Yin-Yang. In Chinese philosophy, the concept of Yin and Yang represents a dualistic approach that captures the fundamental duality of the natural world. This duality, generally represented by phenomena like light and dark, fire and water, or expansion and contraction, represents balance and harmony. In this context, the Yin-Yang motif illustrates those two principles visually. According to Hall (1994) as cited in Saeedi and Farbod (2022, p. 26) the Chinese view the world as consisting of two opposing poles. They consider Yin as the symbol of night and darkness, and Yang as the symbol of day and light. The movement and rotation of Yin and Yang toward each other signify the succession of night and day. According to Chinese belief, Yang (equivalent to the masculine sun) and Yin (equivalent to the feminine moon) are counterparts. The Chinese believe that the sun and the moon, Yin and Yang, will never meet, and with the arrival of one, the other departs. More historically, this motif can even trace roots back to the swastika, or *chalipa*, symbol in Iranian culture with its own deep symbolism. Comparative research has observed that “the *chalipa* as a religious symbol can be traced across ancient civilisations, including Iran, Mesopotamia, India, and China” (Kashtgar, 2011).

4.5 Comparative Analysis of Kilim Motifs in Iran and Serbia

This section presents a comparative analysis of kilim motifs in Iran and Serbia to identify their similarities and differences in two key dimensions. The first dimension explores the kilim motif layout and design to analyse the exact artistic principles, patterns, and aesthetic arrangements used to express the kilim motifs in each tradition. This dimension primarily focuses on the arrangement and distribution of motifs (in the centre and borders) in Iranian and Serbian kilims to identify the differences and similarities in the distribution of motifs in the samples of the research database. The second dimension explores the cultural significations and semiotic interpretations of motifs by conducting a comparative analysis of the thematic domains in the kilims of the two regions. Based on previous data, this analysis aims to identify the semantic and symbolic differences in the motifs used and categorise them accordingly. Additionally, the comparison emphasises how motifs function as a medium for expressing intangible heritage, such as rituals and social norms, which differ according to the historical and cultural contexts of Iran and Serbia. The findings of this comparison indicate the differences in the motifs of the two regions and how the symbolic, semiotic meanings embedded in the kilims are presented.

4.5.1 Motif Layout and Design Structures

Examining the placement and distribution of motifs across the kilims is crucial and can provide notable information for the analysis and study of the arrangement of kilims. Both Iranian and Serbian kilims feature marginal (border) and central motifs. However, the distribution of marginal motifs is fewer and even simpler in Serbian kilims, whereas in Iranian kilims, the border part is more emphasised. Applying statistical analysis on data shows that marginal (border) motifs in Iranian kilims include 111 (26.81%) of the total motifs, while for Serbian kilims, only 77 motifs (18.59%) were identified as tags. This indicates that Iranian kilims use motifs in the margins (borders of kilims) approximately 1.5 times more frequently than Serbian kilims. Therefore, it highlights a stronger emphasis on decorative frames in Iranian kilim design. Diagram 7 shows the comparative distribution of motifs in the borders of Iranian and Serbian kilims.

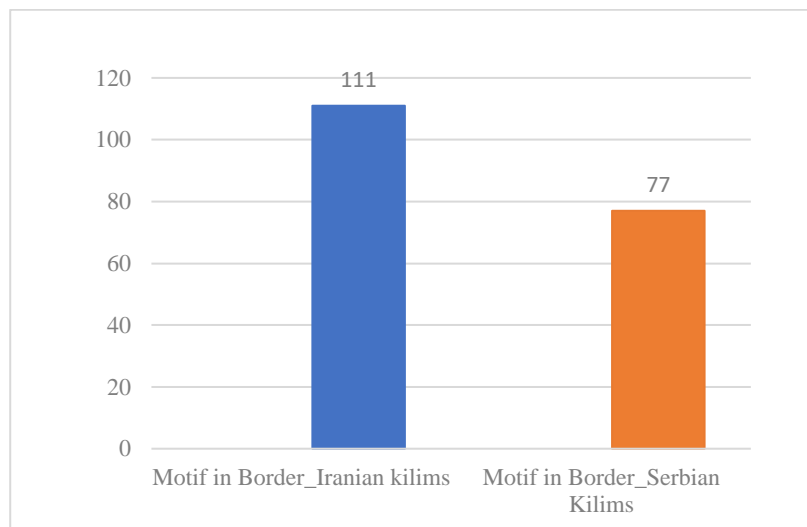


Diagram 7. Comparative Distribution of Motifs in the Kilims Border

While the analysis of the statistics indicates that the frequency of border motifs in Iranian kilims is higher than in Serbian kilims, it also reveals that in Serbian kilims, the motifs are more commonly found in the centre. Based on the statistics, out of 414 tagged motifs on Iranian and Serbian kilims, 303 motifs (73.19%) are placed in the centre of Iranian kilims, while 337 motifs (81.41%) are positioned in the centre of Serbian kilims. Therefore, Serbian kilims feature motifs in the centre approximately 1.1 times more frequently than Iranian kilims. Diagram 8 illustrates the comparative distribution of motifs in the centre of Iranian and Serbian kilims.

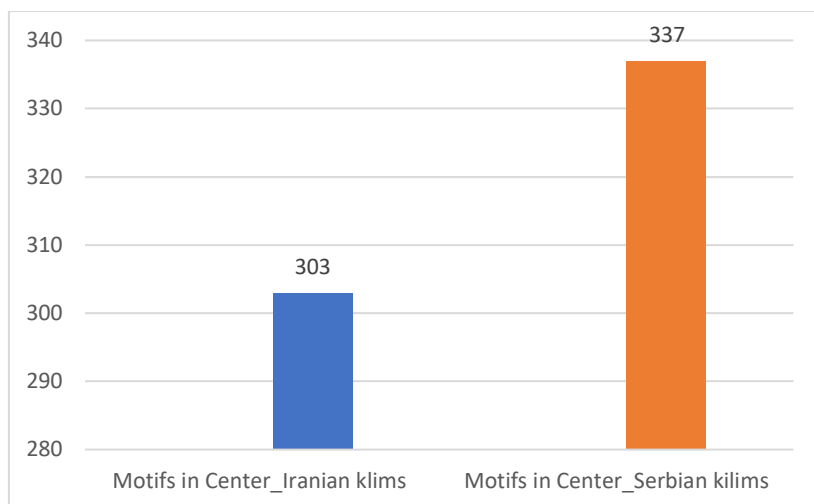


Diagram 8. Comparative Distribution of Motifs in the Centre of Kilims

The emphasis on border motifs, decorative frames, or intricate and detailed margins in Iranian kilims reflects a unique artistic aesthetic rooted in Iran’s cultural appreciation for precision and symmetry, as seen across various forms of Iranian art and architecture. Numerous and densely arranged motifs found in the borders of Iranian kilims could attract the attention and focus of the viewers into the central motifs’ importance. This decorative technique is common not only in kilim weaving but also in other Iranian arts, such as illuminated manuscripts and architecture. For instance, in the art of gilding and calligraphy (which is called Tazhib in Persian) and in architectural inscriptions in mosques, attention is given to colourful and elaborate borders. Examples of this can be seen in figure 18 a folio from the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb from the 16th century, preserved at the Metropolitan Museum (Timeless Moon, n.d.) and figure 19, the intricate tiling of the Imam Mosque in Isfahan (Wikimedia Commons, n.d.).



Figure 18. A Folio from the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb

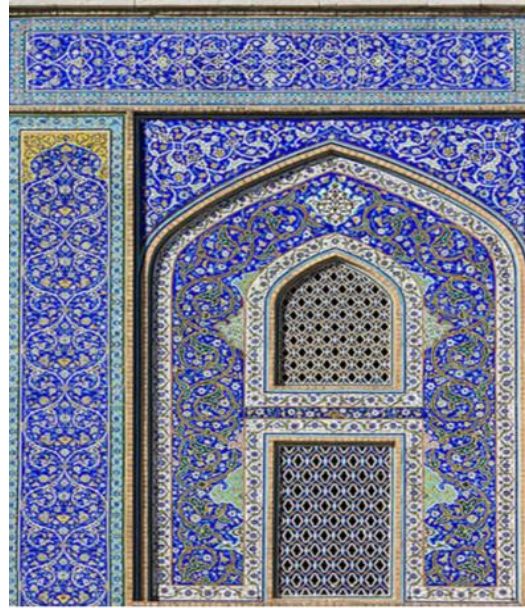


Figure 19. The Intricate Tiling of the Imam Mosque in Isfahan

In Iranian kilims in particular, and Iranian arts in general, the use of colourful and detailed decorative borders and margins goes beyond mere aesthetic value. These borders carry symbolic meanings, often representing “protection or the containment of the central element”. It seems that this arrangement is designed to protect the central concepts (motifs), which are positioned in the centre. This approach suggests that every part of the kilim is significant, giving the entire piece a sense of beauty and meaning in a balanced way. In contrast, in Serbian kilims, the emphasis on central motifs, rather than border motifs, may symbolise a cultural trait of clarity and focus on the essence. In other words, since the central motif represents a focal point of strength or identity, it could draw the viewer’s attention to a powerful or main design in the centre of a kilim rather than spreading decorative elements across the borders. This approach could also reflect the general values in Serbian culture and society that emphasise directness, clarity, unity, and perhaps a more practical mindset. By placing more motifs in the centre of kilims, Serbian weavers highlight the importance of unified and central elements, both in design and symbolically in cultural concepts, suggesting that attention to the essence and main core takes precedence over the border or decorative margins.

4.5.2 Motif Meaning and Their Semiotic Implications

In Iranian kilims, according to the motif tag distribution, motifs related to the domain of “Spirituality and Divine” are the most prominent, accounting for 32.13% of the total motifs. This indicates a strong cultural focus on spirituality and attention to metaphysics and truly reflects the Iranians’ historical and cultural emphasis on mystical and religious concepts. This focus is also visible in other Persian arts, such as painting, calligraphy, and even architecture, and artists, especially in classical arts, have predominantly interests in creating works with spiritual themes. Iranian society, particularly rural and nomadic communities (where kilims are primarily woven), is deeply connected to religion. Thus, the high frequency of motifs in this theme reflects the weavers’ deep attention to religious beliefs and values. Motifs classified within the theme of “Life and Nature” are next in frequency, accounting for 26.07% of the total motifs, and they emphasise the valuable role of natural elements for Iranian kilim weavers.

These motifs reflect the importance of environmental resources such as water and fertile land, which are deeply appreciated in Iran’s arid regions. Iran is a semi-arid country with

limited water resources; therefore, the issue of water supply has been a longstanding concern. As a result, the Iranians tried to be creative, digging numerous Wells and Qanats, and even culturally engaged in the traditional practice of praying for rain. Therefore, rain-seeking motifs, like birds, zigzags, or comb patterns, are frequently observed on Kilims. Figure 20 shows a kilim from Arasbaran, Azerbaijan, that represents the motifs of the desire for rain (Ebadi, 2021, p.106).



Figure 20. An Azerbaijan Kilim Representing Desire for the Rain

In contrast, in Serbian kilims, motifs related to the thematic domain of “Cultural Identity and Social Values” are most frequent and comprise 36.88% of all motifs. This indicates the role of the kilim in preserving and expressing the community’s local traditions and social values. The prevalence of these motifs also indicates that weavers use these symbols in their kilims and that concepts like social solidarity, cultural heritage, and collective identity are very crucial. In other words, this indicates that kilims are considered works that embody collective cultural narratives. Motifs related to the thematic domain of “Protection and power” are also prominent in Serbian kilims, accounting for 27.30% of all motifs. This is consistent with a long-standing tradition in Serbia in which art and symbols are used as talismans for safety and power; in this way, kilims serve as decorative and protective objects. Thus, motifs related to protection and the evil eye, designed to ward off bad luck and prevent harm, are significant in Serbian culture, and some of these cultural elements have been influenced by Turkish-Ottoman culture. Motifs in the domain of “Spirituality and Divine” account for 16.18% of motifs in the database, indicating that spirituality is valued in Serbian culture but is not as central to it as in Iranian kilims. Also, motifs representing “Fertility and Renewal” (12.24%) and motifs related to “Life and Nature” (5.31%) show the connection of Serbian culture with life cycles, agriculture, and the natural environment. However, these themes are less emphasised than cultural identity and conservation. Figure 21 illustrates an example of a Pirot kilim that illustrate the motif related to social values in the centre (National Museum of Kruševac (n.d.).



Figure 21. A Pirot Kilim Motifs Representing Social Values

The thematic domain of motifs between Iranian and Serbian kilims reflects the distinct cultural priorities of the two traditions. In this classification, Iranian kilims mainly reflect a combination of spiritual, natural and protective themes, and have a strong element of mysticism, indicating a culture that values a divine and metaphysical connection to life. Also, the presence of motifs with meanings related to nature, especially those referring to the desire for rain, shows the attention and focus of the weavers on the fundamental issues of life, namely the struggle to make a living and struggle with arid nature. From these aspects, it can be concluded that Iranian kilims emphasise motifs that address both spiritual life and everyday needs. In contrast, Serbian kilims mainly emphasise cultural identity and social values, and they use motifs that reflect shared values and collective heritage. The focus on protection and power in Serbian kilims suggests that these kilims often functioned as symbols of solidity and security in the home. This difference in emphasis on such motifs may stem from Serbia's historical context, where art was often a means of preserving cultural identity against external influences and challenges.

4.6 A Case Study Analysis of Iranian and Serbian Kilims

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of selected Iranian and Serbian kilim samples. This analysis is based on the research methodology and the motif classification framework developed in this study. Through this case study, the unique and intriguing characteristics of these motifs are examined, and a detailed description of them is provided to enable better interpretation. For this purpose, one kilim has been selected and analysed from each of the regions studied in this study from Iran (Qashqai, Bakhtiari, Khorasan, Azerbaijan, and Kurdistan). In addition, three examples of kilims from Serbia, the Pirot region, have also been examined, the details of which are presented in the tables 21-28, as follows.

4.6.1 Motif Analysis of the Qashqai Kilim

Table 20. Description and Analysis of a Sample Qashqai Kilim Motifs



Qashqa'i Kilim, wool, 18th century (271 x 142 cm), (Hall & Barnard (1999, p. 37)


| Motifs | Connotative Meaning | Thematic Domains |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Bird's head | Rain | Life and Nature |
| Diamond Star Complex | Eternity | Spirituality and Divine |
| Comb | Rain | Life and Nature |
| Flower (Marvel of Peru) | Sky entrances | Spirituality and Divine |

Analysis:

The motifs on this kilim represent a harmonised mix of nature, life, and spirituality, demonstrating a close relationship between the physical and metaphysical realms. Recurring motifs related to rain, such as the “Bird’s Head” and “Comb,” emphasise the importance of water and land fertility, which is needed for running life. On the other hand, the motifs of “Complex Diamond Star” and “Flower (Marvel of Peru)” present the spiritual aspect that reflects the weaver’s view of eternity and connection to divine sources. These elements indicate that the kilim is not merely decorative but has deep cultural and sacred meanings that blend the material world with spiritual issues. Through its motifs, the kilim reflects the natural forces that contribute to the flow of life.

4.6.2 Motif Analysis of the Bakhtiari Kilim

Table 21. Description and Analysis of a Sample Bakhtiari Kilim Motifs

|  | | |
|---|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Bakhtiari Kilim, Wool, (2.29 x 1.21m), (Hall & Barnard (1999, p. 45) | | |
| Motifs | Connotative Meaning | Thematic Domains |
| Garden Pond | Spirituality | Spirituality and Divine |
| Man & Woman | Masculinity & Marriage | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Tree | Eternity | Spirituality and Divine |
| Hen | Wealth | Fertility and Renewal |
| Flower (Marvel of Peru) | Sky Entrance | Spirituality and Divine |
| <p>Analysis: By analysing and studying the motifs used in this kilim, it becomes clear that these motifs reflect rural life and contain concepts related to social values, spirituality, and the deep connection between humans and nature. The whole design and motifs, beyond depicting the material aspects of rural life, indicate a symbolic connection between humans, nature, and the divine. The motif of “garden pond” signifies spirituality and the divine. Water, seen as an essential source of life for people, also symbolises spiritual purification and a link with cosmic forces. Similarly, the tree, an ancient symbol of eternity and continuity, represents intergenerational relationships and the strength of social ties. The motifs of “men and women” together represent a balanced social system, a unified cultural identity. These motifs reflect the structure of a rural society and the rules of collective survival based on shared responsibility and values. Animal motifs also play a prominent role in kilims. The hen is of great importance in the daily life of the villagers in its symbolic meaning of wealth, fertility, and renewal. Birds are spiritual messengers and can symbolise prosperity and happiness in many cultures. In addition, the flower “Marvel of Peru,” which is known as the gateway to heaven, indicates the bridge between the material and divine worlds, which represented the villagers’ desire to remain spiritually linked to higher orders. These motifs can refer to ancient legends in which nature, social life, and cosmic concepts are intertwined: the presence of a tree and a garden pond recalls the Garden of Eden, the original residence that symbolises harmony between man and nature. The animal motif reflects rural life and refers to ancient beliefs about nature’s protective and life-giving powers.</p> | | |

4.6.3 Motif Analysis of the Khorasan Kilim

Table 22. Description and Analysis of a Sample Khorasan Kilim Motifs



Khorasan (Quchan Kilim), Second half 19th century (1.79 x 3.13cm), (Hall & Barnard (1999, p. 68)

| Motifs | Connotative Meaning | Thematic Domains |
|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Diamond Star | Eternity | Spirituality and Divine |
| Fetter | Unity | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Eye | Protection | Protection and Power |
| Marvel of Peru | Sky entrance | Spirituality and Divine |

Analysis: This kilim suggests how motifs can reflect deeply rooted cultural beliefs, social values or mythological symbols. The motifs on this kilim carry connotative and symbolic meanings related to the relationships between humans, nature, and divine sources. The motif of “diamond star” stands for eternity, the endless cycle of life. This motif is strongly associated with spirituality and the divine sources. The “fetter motif”, which is associated with unity, represents the importance of social values and collective identity. Moreover, this motif reminds the individual of the role he or she plays in the broader social and collective context, which is crucial to the maintenance of social order and values in traditional societies. The “eye motif”, an ancient symbol of protection, has long been used as a talisman against evil and for empowerment. It is believed that the motif protects the weavers from negative forces. Beyond its protective function, it also represents insight, awareness, and a stronger connection to both the material and spiritual worlds. In addition to the protective function, it also represents insight, awareness, and a deeper physical and spiritual relationship. The motif of the flower “Marvel of Peru” symbolises a gateway to the heavens and reflects a deep spiritual desire for divine connection and for a new meaning beyond the material. Overall, the motifs on this kilim create a symbolic narrative that blends cultural heritage, social values, and mythological thought. The interactions of these concepts in the kilim reflect a deep understanding of human relationships and the spiritual dimensions of life.

4.6.4 Motif Analysis of the Azerbaijan Kilim

Table 23. Description and Analysis of a Sample Azerbaijan Kilim Motifs



Azerbaijan Kilim, (Ebadi, 2022, p. 104)

| Motifs | Connotative Meaning | Thematic Domains |
|------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Garden Pond | Spirituality | Spirituality and Divine |
| Bird's Head | Rain | Life and Nature |
| Star | Happiness | Life and Nature |
| Two headed Birds | Duality | Spirituality and Divine |

Analysis: In this kilim, motifs are used that carry specific meanings and are attached to spiritual, natural, and life-related concepts. This Garden Pond motif is indeed a representation of spirituality it is a sacred space that connects the individual with the divine. It is frequently found in Azerbaijani kilims and very often symbolises paradise and deep peace. The Bird's Head pattern is known to symbolise rain as a source of life and nature, expressing vitality and prosperity. In this region, birds symbolise a sense of happiness and thriving life. Reflecting happiness and representing fortune, the Star motif is used widely throughout the natural world and in the spiritual world, as a symbol of guidance and light as it represents a higher perspective. It is also believed to bring luck and happiness in the Azerbaijani kilims. Mythical two-headed animals, which in this kilim are represented as birds, are mostly used on the edges of woven kilims. They can symbolize Sufi thoughts about the mirror-like and dual nature of the world. They can also symbolize double strength and duality. The two-headed bird is the most commonly used motif in the borders. Consequently, the motifs in this kilim depict Azerbaijani culture, linking nature, life, spirituality, and regional beliefs and values.

4.6.5 Motif Analysis of the Kurdistan Kilim

Table 24. Description and Analysis of a Sample Kurdistan Motifs




Kurdistan kilim, Kurds of Bijar (3.27 x 1.44m), (Hall & Barnard (1999, p. 65)

| Motifs | Connotative Meaning | Thematic Domains |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Diamond Star | Eternity | Spiritual and Divine |
| Man | Masculinity | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Woman | Marriage | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Goat | Masculinity | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Ram's Horn | Fertility | Fertility and Renewal |

Analysis: This Bijar Kurdish kilim can be analysed by its motifs in the context of Mithraism and their connection with this ritual. Mithraism is known as one of the influential spiritual traditions of ancient Iran. It interprets the universe through cosmic order and the interrelationship of natural, human, and divine elements. In this kilim, the diamond star motif is associated with the sun, Mithraism's most central symbol. In this belief system, the sun was not only the source of light and life but also a symbol of eternity and divine power. To add to that, from a Mithric perspective, the four sides of the star (the quadrilateral shape) represented the four founding elements, which were responsible for keeping the world smooth and balanced- water, wind, fire, and earth. These, and the sun, together assured fertility and abundance on earth. The motifs of man and woman can be linked to sacred unions in Mithraic traditions. In this worldview, man and woman were not just an earthly pair but cosmic principles representing oppositional, equal forces working together to hold the universe in balance. These motifs highlight the importance of marriage in sustaining social harmony and the balance of humanity with nature. The goat and ram horn motifs could also indicate Mithraism since horned animals frequently appeared in ancient reliefs as symbols of vitality, fertility, and triumph over darkness and chaos. In Mithraic traditions, these animals were often associated with solar power, physical strength, and their connection to celestial forces. The ram, in particular, was linked with sacred sacrifice, renewal, and the connection between humans and the divine. Overall, this kilim not only reflects the artistry and cultural traditions of the Kurdish people of Bijar but also, on a deeper level, carries traces of Mithraic thought and ancient Iranian cosmology. The interplay of solar, cosmic, and human within these motifs attests to humanity's inalienable connection to the cosmos and aspirations to balance, fertility, and continuity in the physical world.

4.6.6 Motif Analysis of the Pirot Kilim (1)

Table 25. Description and Analysis of a Sample Pirot Kilim Motifs

|  | | |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Pirot Kilim, Second half of 19 th century (198 x 138m), (Cvetković, 2016, p. 178) | | |
| Motifs | Connotative Meaning | Thematic Domains |
| Soveljka (Shuttle) | Connection | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Fetter | Unity | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Hook (čendjeli) | Support | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Flower | Beauty | Life and Nature |
| <p>Analysis: This Pirot kilim, dating from the second half of the 19th century, is considered a sample of the region’s rich weaving tradition and reflects profound cultural, social, and symbolic meanings. A closer inspection of its motifs shows that these motifs carry values and beliefs that have been passed down through generations. The Soveljka (shuttle) motif stands for connection and continuity. As the essential tool in weaving, the shuttle symbolises the connection between generations, the transmission of knowledge, and the safeguarding of cultural identity. Its presence in the kilim emphasises the concept of life’s continuity and the eternal thread of tradition. The fetter motif signifies unity and cohesion. In traditional and especially rural communities, solidarity among relatives and family members was essential, which is also represented by this motif and indicates the shared values and collective identity of the people of Pirot. Its recurrence highlights social unity as well. The hook (čendjeli) motif symbolises support and protection. In many textile traditions and kilims, hook-like motifs were used as protective symbols believed to ward off negative influences. In the Pirot kilim, the čendjeli motif represents mutual assistance within the community and persistence and solidarity in overcoming life’s challenges. Among the many interesting motifs of this kilim is the flower motif, which is located along the border and surrounded by two petals. Indeed, this pattern is almost similar to that of the Herati motif, which is common in carpets and kilims of Persian origin, a pattern with Mithraic roots. Initially, this motif showed a cup of wine inside a lotus flower (wine being a symbolic element in Mithraic ritual). However, after Islam spread in Persia and due to the prohibition of wine, the cup was transformed into a floral design. As floral motifs in Serbian kilims are frequently connected to vineyards, it is likely that this motif is a variant of the ancient Persian Mithraic symbol. Its presence in the Balkans could come from cultural interchanges and the transfer of artistic motives from the East to the West, especially through Anatolia. Overall, the motifs in this kilim reflect a profound connection between tradition, spirituality, and social values. The similar patterns to those in the East highlight historical and cultural interactions between the two regions.</p> | | |


4.6.7 Motif Analysis of the Pirot Kilim (2)

Table 26. Description and Analysis of a Sample Pirot Kilim Motifs

|  | | |
|--|---------------------|-------------------------|
| <p>Pirot Kilim, Late 19th century (155 x 110 cm), (Vlatković, 2022, p. 266)</p> | | |
| Motifs | Connotative Meaning | Thematic Domains |
| Turtle (Željka) | Fertility | Fertility and Renewal |
| Octopus | Protection | Protection and Power |
| Eye (Očila) | Protection | Protection and Power |
| Kuveri pattern | Protection | Protection and Power |
| Sofra | Eternity | Spirituality and Divine |
| <p>Analysis: This kilim is filled with a variety of protective motifs such as the octopus, eye (očila), and the Kuveri pattern, which lend it a talismanic nature often seen as a shield against negative forces. These motifs reflect a belief in the protective power of the kilim in maintaining security and protection for the living environment. The octopus motif in Serbian kilims resembles the bird-head motif found in Iranian kilims, which functions as a talismanic symbol intended to summon rain in Iran. Since this motif in Serbian kilims is also accompanied by bird's wings and is present in kilims with the Kuveri pattern, if considering that the Kuveri pattern resembles a water pond, it can be suggested that this motif in Iranian kilims traditionally represent sources of water, as well as the invocation of rain and blessings. Therefore, it is likely that these symbols were passed from the East to the Balkans, and possibly their connotative meanings changed to fit new cultural contexts. Another significant motif in the Pirot kilim is the Sofra, representing eternity and spiritual concepts. In Iran, this motif is known as the diamond star and deeply connects with the themes of fertility and the continuity of life. The turtle motif in Serbian kilims is traditionally interpreted as a symbol of fertility and even durability; however, the researcher of this thesis argues that this motif is more closely related to combining the symbolic elements of masculinity and femininity than to a turtle depiction. These two motifs are designed as symmetrical shapes and geometric figures or as a combination of curved and angular lines and signs that visualise balance and represent the unity of two opposing energies in nature. From this perspective, this composition can represent the cosmic duality leading to fertility and eternity.</p> | | |

4.6.8 Motif Analysis of the Pirot Kilim (3)

Table 27. Description and Analysis of a Sample Pirot Kilim Motifs

|  | | |
|---|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Vlatković (2022), Pirot Kilim, E-2133 (192 x 145 cm) | | |
| Motifs | Connotative Meaning | Thematic Domains |
| Fruit | Abundance | Fertility and Renewal |
| Devil's Knee (Vraško kolena) | Protection | Protection and Power |
| Soveljka (Shuttle) | Connection | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| Fetter | Unity | Cultural Identity and Social Values |
| <p>Analysis: Analysing the key motifs of this kilim shows the values and beliefs of the weavers in Pirot and, in a broader context, in the Balkans. These motifs reflect the importance of abundance, power, cultural exchange, and community. The fruit motif signifies abundance and fertility, closely associated with the richness of the land and the continuity of generations. The motif could reflect the weaver's wishes for a fruitful life and prosperity. The devil's knee motif (Vraško kolena) symbolises power and protection, and by including this motif in the kilim, a sense of stability and security against life's challenges. The Soveljka (Shuttle) motif, inspired by weaving tools, represents the cultural connection and knowledge transfer. It highlights the importance of preserving and transferring skills and traditions from one generation to the next, which is closely connected to cultural and social identity. The Fetter motif, as mentioned earlier, represents unity and social cohesion and indicates a strong connection between members of the family and community. This motif also highlights solidarity and cooperation as central components of social life. Overall, the combination of motifs in this piece of Pirot kilim reflects the fundamental principles of Serbian societal tradition, such as unity, collective cooperation, and continuity across generations.</p> | | |

4.7 Conclusion of Chapter 4

This chapter provides an in-depth study and analysis of the research data, and it is organised according to the theoretical framework and methodology described in Chapter 3. The analysis is carried out in three interconnected parts: (1) statistical analysis, (2) descriptive analysis, and (3) comparative analysis. The statistical analysis begins with an examination of the distribution of motifs in the studied samples, which are studied in three main dimensions: Placement of motif (border or centre), Type of motif (geometric and abstract, animal, plant,

and human), and Thematic Domains, which include spirituality and divinity, fertility and renewal, life and nature, protection and power, and cultural identity and social values.

In the Quantitative Analysis, the frequency and repetition of motifs in these classifications are examined and presented through detailed tables and graphs, which help to understand the artistic and cultural priorities hidden in the studied motifs.

In the Descriptive Analysis, the most frequent and significant motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims are introduced and analysed, as possible, from a symbolic, historical, and cultural perspective. This analysis addresses the connotative and symbolic meanings underlying the motifs and provides a deeper understanding of their artistic significance in their cultural context. Therefore, the underlying layers of meaning hidden in the motifs, which mainly have mythological, historical, and cultural roots, have been examined.

In the *Comparative Analysis* and based on the statistics and findings, the differences and similarities in placement of motifs, types, and thematic domains of motifs are compared and discussed. A key finding of this research is the difference in motif placement and distribution. Iranian kilims have a high density of motifs in the border and margin of the kilims, reflecting a more general style of Iranian art and emphasising multi-layered and integrated elements through the use of borders and frames in an artwork. This style creates a balanced and harmonious composition and allows the kilim to be carefully decorated. In contrast, Serbian kilims focus the motifs in the centre so that the main design fills the central part of the kilim. The focus on the centre could symbolise unity, strength, and attention to the central identity, while the edges serve only as a frame rather than a main point of attention. This structural difference in the placement of motifs reflects different cultural values and artistic styles. Iranian kilims, in addition to the distribution of motifs in the centre, which includes the highest density of motifs in a kilim and in accordance with the current tradition seen in other artistic productions, pay special attention to the border and framing, while in the Serbian kilim weaving tradition, the main attention is on the centre as the symbolic heart of the design.

The results indicate differences in Iranian and Serbian kilim motifs in terms of thematic, connotative, and symbolic meanings. Iranian kilims often feature mystical and spiritual motifs; therefore, the themes in the domain of “Spirituality and Divine” with “Life and Nature” are dominant. These motifs represent an internal and symbolic perspective that prioritises themes of transcendence and harmony with nature. Serbian kilim motifs, in contrast, highlight themes of “Cultural Identity and Social Values” as well as “Protection and Power,” which emphasise the collective spirit and identity of Serbian society as well as the willingness to ward off evil influences. These motifs often have narratives that reflect shared history, traditions, and values and reinforce the sense of belonging, cultural pride, and care. Also, in this chapter, as a case study in accordance with the research methodology and based on the classification of motifs, their implicit meaning and thematic domain, eight kilims (5 kilims from Iran and 3 kilims from Serbia) were examined and analysed, and the symbolic, cultural, and historical meaning of their motifs was presented.

Finally, the findings of this chapter prove that Iranian and Serbian kilim traditions similarly use motifs as decorative elements and carriers of profound cultural, connotative, and symbolic meanings. The difference in the distribution of motifs based on their placement, types, and thematic domains in these two regions highlights how each culture expresses its worldview, values, and identity. As a result, the findings offer a deeper understanding of the artistry and cultural significance of kilim motifs in Iran and Serbia.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an overview of research and results through a comparison of Iranian and Serbian kilim motifs. This chapter synthesises the patterns and motifs that have emerged from the study of both cultures, examines their meanings and symbolism within each culture, and provides recommendations for further research. As the concluding chapter, it discusses the contributions of the study as well as the broader implications of its findings.

5.1 Introduction

The chapter summarises the main topics covered in the previous chapters and presents the most significant findings of comparative research on Iranian and Serbian kilim motifs. The objective of the present study was to address fundamental questions regarding the structure, types, and cultural significance of motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims, particularly with respect to each region's unique cultural values. By employing a semiotic-anthropological framework alongside a comparative approach, the research analyses kilim motifs of the two countries. The findings reveal that motifs in each region work as cultural narratives, carrying symbols and identity markers that go beyond mere decoration. In this chapter, after summarising the main themes and comparative results, a systematic framework for future research in this field is proposed. Finally, some recommendations for further research are included.

5.2 Summary of Chapters and Key Insights

Chapter 1, *Introduction*, presented the fundamental concepts, research objectives, research questions, and providing an overview of the methodology and research approach. The chapter began with an introduction to the cultural and artistic legacy of kilim weaving in Iran and Serbia, tracing its origins in Central Asian nomadic traditions and its development through historical cultural exchanges. After laying out foundational concepts and definitions, such as the specific regions in Iran and Serbia where kilim weaving is done as an art form, the chapter presented the study's objectives and research questions, focusing on identifying and analysing kilim motifs to address a notable gap in existing research. It also explained the approach of semiotics and semiotic anthropology, which provided insight into the symbolic and cultural meanings of kilim motifs representing various beliefs, emotions, and values of each culture. This chapter described the research methodology. Finally, the chapter offered a detailed outline of the thesis structure and summarised the contents of each of the following chapters.

Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, consisted of three main parts: first the historical background on kilim weaving in Iran and Serbia; second a summary of major previous research on the topic; and foundational information about the theoretical framework based on anthropological semiotics. The first part provided a historical review, explaining the history, development and cultural significance of kilim weaving in Iran and Serbia. It examined how kilim weaving evolved across various regions and among distinct nomadic and tribal groups in Iran, such as the Shahsevan, Qashqai, and Bakhtiari and some more tribes and cities, each contributing unique patterns, techniques and symbolic motifs. In Serbia, Pirot kilims are well-recognised and relatively appreciated for their characteristic: quality and complexity of the design. This section explored how kilims function as functional textiles and vital symbols of cultural identity, shaped by the history and social practices of the respective regions. The second part explored key academic publications on motifs and designs of kilims from the perspectives of art history, anthropology, and semiotics. Research into the cultural, symbolic, and aesthetic dimensions of kilim motifs has been brought into this chapter to reflect aspects of spiritual beliefs, social identities, and regional histories. Some studies have focused directly on specific types of kilims and their regional variations. Others focused on comparative studies that brought attention to shared motifs between Iranian and Serbian kilims while acknowledging the different styles adapted in local communities. This comparative perspective reveals the complex interplay of local traditions and common motifs shaped by historical exchanges, migrations and cultural interactions. The theoretical framework was presented in the third part, which discussed the possible interpretation of kilim motifs as sign-symbols in the sense of cultural semiotic and anthropological semiotic. This section uses the semiotic

theories of Saussure, Peirce, Barthes, and Lotman to discuss signifiers and signified, denotation and connotation, and myth. This framework provided an understanding of how kilim motifs mediated and expressed cultural values, beliefs, and identities. This section established a semiotic and anthropological theoretical framework for the statistical, descriptive and comparative analyses of Iranian and Serbian kilim motifs presented in the thesis.

Chapter 3, *Methodology*, this chapter described a systematic approach used for a comparative study of kilim motifs in Iran and Serbia, set within the context of semiotics anthropology. After reviewing the research questions and objectives, the study was structured analysis of kilim motifs in the two cultures in three main phases: data collection, categorisation and statistical analysis. The first phase involved establishing a comprehensive database of the kilim motifs from the territory of Iran and Serbia. This involved setting standards for motif collection and labelling, ultimately establishing a logical and systematic database of motif data. Phase 2 included developing a motif annotation system and deriving a tagging system based on four principal categories: kilim region, motif placement, motif type, and thematic domain. In this step, the primary Iranian and Serbian motifs were separately described and then listed with their connotative meanings, which shows the depth of their symbolic role. The last stage consisted of producing reports from the database that were used to perform statistical, descriptive, and comparative analyses which are outlined in Chapter 4. This stage enabled the analysis of commonalities and differences between Iranian and Serbian motifs, revealing the socio-cultural heritage and regional meanings of motifs.

Chapter 4, *Findings and Analysis*, the research findings and data analysis are presented in three broad sections: statistical analysis, descriptive analysis of the motifs, and comparative evaluation. This study showed that in both regions, kilim weaving was a means of expressing culture, art, and symbolism. By getting help from an anthropological and semiotic approach, the study examined how motifs reflect beliefs, traditions, and social values. It provided new understanding about the cultural and symbolic meanings of motifs applied in kilims as well as helping to find similarities and differences in Iranian and Serbian weaving traditions. This final chapter presented the thesis's achievements, explored their significance to cultural exchange and preservation studies, and proposed ideas for future research on the kilim symbols and motifs. The conclusion provides the need for broader research, demonstrating that kilims acted as valuable historical records of the cultures that produced them.

5.3 Overview of the Comparative Analysis of Iranian and Serbian Kilim Motifs

This thesis investigated the motifs on selected Iranian and Serbian kilims, adopting a methodology grounded in a two main theoretical framework of semiotic and semiotic-anthropology to conduct comparative quantitative and qualitative analyses. The results show that Iranian kilims bring about the importance of the theme of the divine, nature, and cultural values, while Serbian kilims draw attention more on cultural identity, social values, and protective symbolism. The study reveals different as well as common cultural elements between the two traditions by analysing the structural compositions, statistical frequencies, and thematic roles of motifs. The findings suggest that kilim motifs work as cultural records, reflecting the beliefs and practices of the studied regions.

The statistical analysis revealed a different distribution of motifs in Iranian and Serbian kilims. In Iranian kilims, motifs were often centered (73.19%), in line with the artistic and symbolic emphasis of this culture. Thematic domains showed a strong inclination toward divine and supernatural motifs (32.13%) and natural elements (26.07%). In contrast, Serbian

kilims had 81.41% of motifs centered, with a high prevalence of geometric and abstract motifs (54.32%). Serbian kilims emphasized cultural identity and social values (36.88% of the total), suggesting a communal focus on heritage and protective symbolism.

The descriptive analysis revealed different forms and placements of the motifs that displayed particular cultural meanings. Iranian kilim has designs such as Bird's head and Toranj with a mythical, historical and cultural meanings related to ancient beliefs and nature. Frequent motifs in Serbian kilims such as Turtle and Sofra, representing longevity, unity, and family values. The comparative analysis highlighted both shared and unique elements between Iranian and Serbian kilims. The comparative analysis highlighted both shared and unique elements between Iranian and Serbian kilims. While geometric types of motifs were featured in both traditions, Iranian kilims frequently presented spiritual and mythical themes, while Serbian kilims focused on social values and protective motifs. Regional differences are evident in the symbolic meaning of motifs seen in the two cultures, with the Iranian climate being hot and semi-arid, so the motifs are often rain-seeking, while the motifs in Serbia represent a rural landscape and motifs of protection. The comparison highlighted the cross-cultural exchange between these regions but also revealed the different symbolic emphases of each culture.

In response to the research questions (3.2), all the proposed hypotheses were confirmed, and the results were presented in detail in Chapter 4 through quantitative, qualitative, and comparative analyses. In summary, it can be concluded that there were shared motifs with the same shape but different connotative meanings, such as the eye, fetter, hook, flower, finger, turtle, eagle, tree, tulip, and star, with the same meaning in both regions. Additionally, the kilim of Serbia represents the bride's dowry or the star diagram, which is an ancient symbol related to the Mithraic cult in Iran. However, this widely used motif in Serbian kilims is presented as a table motif with implicit meanings of gathering and unity. Also, the mihrab motif in Pirot kilims bears a resemblance to the motif of the medallion in Iranian kilims. Motifs such as the comb (which symbolises rain in Iranian kilims) are found in both regions, although their connotative meanings differ in each. Furthermore, in Iran, animal and plant motifs exhibit more diversity compared to the motifs in Serbian kilims. Almost all local rural animals, birds, various trees, flowers, plants, and fruits are depicted in Iranian kilims, and because Iran is a dry country, motifs related to rain-seeking are prevalent in kilims from various regions. On the other hand, the motifs in Serbian kilims mostly reflect the abundant and fertile nature of the region. Additionally, geometric motifs are more commonly used in both regions due to the simplicity of weaving and the creation of symmetry.

5.4 Proposed Model for Kilim Motif Classification and Analysis

While an immense variety of designs, patterns, and motifs can be explored across kilims, establishing a clearer framework for classification and analysis is necessary to enrich understanding of them. Kilim motif categorisation does not have a model or methodology based on a theoretical framework as much as it is expected, according to current literature and research reviews. This thesis introduces a comprehensive model for classifying and analysing kilim motifs. This model, developed from constructions of theoretical bases, allows the identification, distinction, and analysis of specific kilim motifs and patterns. It is based on theoretical principles that make it useful for both applied and theoretical studies. The model consists of three levels, which can be used separately or in any combination. This allows for a modular and a layered approach. simultaneously, some layers can still operate as independent levels and others will have dependencies. These theoretical frames direct the analysis for each of these levels, respectively. The following sections provide a detailed introduction to each level of classification and analysis:

5.4.1 Form-Based Classification (Formalistic Analysis)

This level of identification and analysis can be contextualised through Clive Bell's theory of "Significant Form." (Bell, 1914). He built on this concept to expand literary structuralism and formalism into the domain of art, drawing on the perspectives of Shklovsky and Russian formalists in literature. As Bell describes, the characteristics that elevate a work to the status of art is its possession of significant form which arises from the way elements such as colours, shapes, volumes, and spaces arrange and react together. This concept of significant form much like Gestalt psychology diagrams, directly targets the imagination, encouraging the viewer of the artwork to fill any gaps or empty spaces within the piece by considering the cohesive overall design that governs it. Thus, significant form becomes independent of any connection to content and refers only to itself. Simply by observing the artwork and identifying the significant form within it, one can compensate for its deficiencies and enjoy the presence of a unified and coherent design (Hussey, 2019). Accordingly, through formalistic analysis of the patterns and motifs in a kilim, four types of motifs can be identified, as follows:

- (1) *Geometric and Abstract Motifs*: Non-representational shapes and patterns, such as triangles or zigzags, which stand on their own as formal elements.
- (2) *Animal-Representative Motifs*: Motifs that resemble animals, providing a visual link to creatures like scorpions, turtles, and deer.
- (3) *Plant-Representative Motifs*: Motifs that resemble plants, providing a visual link to nature, such as trees, flowers, and fruits.
- (4) *Human-Representative Motifs*: Motifs with human forms, often simplified to show features like faces, hands, or bodies.

5.4.2 Meaning-Based Classification (Semiotic Analysis)

This level of identification and analysis aligns with Peirce's semiotic theoretical framework as already mentioned in 2.5.4.2, which generally categorises signs into three types as iconic, indexical, and symbolic (Chandler, 2007, pp. 36-37), each representing a distinct way of conveying meaning, which includes:

- (1) *Icons*: Icons in Peirce's framework resemble their referents, which can be observed in kilim motifs that directly depict objects or cultural symbols, such as animals or specific artifacts. According to Peirce, icons are foundational in sign relations, where resemblance plays a key role in meaning creation.
- (2) *Indexes*: These include indexes, which are indexical signs in Peirce's model, indicating their referents with some direct or causal connection. In kilims, figures representing things in nature, rain or fertility, have, in many ways, been functioning more as indexes of hopes or wishes for specific results. This claim can be interpreted in terms of the sign-object relationship, Peirce mentions that the presence of a sign implies its referent.
- (3) *Symbols*: According to Peirce, symbols are signs whose meanings are determined by cultural-natural conventions rather than by their resemblance or direct connection. This holds for abstract kilim motifs such as the Tree of Life or the evil eye, expressing concepts of protection or eternity (Landsberg, 1980) developing significance from collective cultural knowledge rather than visual similarity.

Also, Jakobson’s insights on combining iconic and symbolic elements enrich the analysis. Jakobson noted how conceptual art often combines symbolic and iconic signs to create layered meanings. This blending of metaphorical (symbolic) meaning with structural form (iconic elements) in kilim motifs aligns with Jakobson’s views on how metonymic structures contribute to overall symbolism. Therefore, by combining the semiotic approach of both Peirce and Jakobson, a detailed interpretation of kilim motifs will be achieved. Figure 22 shows a combination of these two approaches for analysing motif meaning:



Figure 22. Semiotic Categorisation Layer of Motifs

Using this semiotic framework, kilim motifs can be classified into two general groups:

- (1) **Motifs representing Blessing:** These motifs embody wishes for prosperity and well-being. Motifs such as Tree of Life, Wheat, Rooster, Dove, Eight-pointed Star, Fish, Flower (Lily), Turtle, Diamond Star (Simple), Goat can be categorised in this group.
- (2) **Motifs representing Protection:** These motifs represent safeguarding against harm and evil forces. Motifs such as Eye (Očilo), Scorpion, Hook, Snake, Raven, Cross, Lion Paws, Dragon, Soldier, can be classified in this group.

This broad and dual classification can include all motifs under a unifying concept according to the following explanation: The main and significant concept that humans have pursued throughout history is “existence or life,” either in its material form or as the continuation of eternal life in its spiritual form. The manifestation of this core concept can be distinguished in two categories of symbols and motifs. Some of these signs affirmatively express the desire for life, contentment, and blessings (i.e., life itself), which are referred to here as “*motifs representing blessing*”. The other group follows the same concept in a different forms, these are signs used to defend against dangers that threaten the flow of life, referred to here as “*motifs representing protection*”. For thousands of years, men have sought blessings from celestial forces for their farmlands, such as requesting rain, fertility, power, honor, and similar concepts. Similarly, they aimed to protect themselves from all kinds of dangers and enemies. All these efforts were ultimately directed toward attaining “the existence and life” (the concept of blessing) and combating deficiency or “death, and nonexistence” (the concept of protection).

5.4.3 Context-Based Classification (Cultural Semiotic Analysis)

This level of classification is mainly in accordance with semiotic anthropology, which uses semiotic theories to analyse cultural concepts, symbols, and social phenomena within their specific contexts. As discussed in 2.5.5, semiotic anthropology is based on the foundational ideas of Peirce and Saussure. It combines their theories with Lotman’s cultural semiotics and Barthes’s semiology, especially his work on mythologies. This combined approach and use of historical insights are reflected in the development of semiotic anthropology. Therefore, semiotic anthropology helps to understand how meanings are conveyed through signs and symbols in art, cultural works, and cultural expressions so that they go beyond their outside appearance (Boroch, 2018, p. 212). On the other hand, this approach highlights how art crafts

in general and motifs in particular are connected to a society's histories, rituals, and shared beliefs, enriching the understanding of a community's worldview and values. Overall, this level of classification and analysis examines motifs in terms of cultural and social functions and socio-cultural context. The subcategories consist of:

- (1) *Ethnic Identity*: Motifs specific to tribes or ethnic groups indicate distinct cultural identities (e.g., Qashqai).
- (2) *Ritual and Mythological Beliefs*: Motifs associated with sacred myths or rituals (e.g., motifs symbolising sacred trees or deities such as Mithras).
- (3) *Historical Background*: Motifs and patterns rooted in ancient signs and symbols, (e.g., Aryan swastika)
- (4) *Religious Identity*: Motifs connected to religious practices, (e.g., the Mihrab)
- (5) *Geographical Origins*: Motifs associated with specific locations (e.g., Caucasus motifs).

The comprehensive proposed model for the classification and analysis of kilim motifs can be summarised and outlined as follows.

- (1) **Form-Based Classification (Formalistic Analysis)**: This layer focuses on the structural and visual aspects of motifs and they can consequently be categorised to:

- a. Geometric and Abstract Motifs
- b. Animal-Representative Motifs
- c. Plant-Representative Motifs
- d. Human-Representative Motifs

- (2) **Meaning-Based Classification (Semiotic Analysis)**: Including three interconnected layers:

- a. Core Semantic Layer:
 - Iconic Motifs (Visual resemblance)
 - Indexical Motifs (Associative link)
 - Symbolic Motifs (Associative link)
- b. Contextual Meaning Layer
 - Metonymic Relationships (Association by proximity)
 - Metaphoric Relationships (Abstract representation)
- c. Thematic Layer
 - Motifs representing Blessing
 - Motifs representing Protection

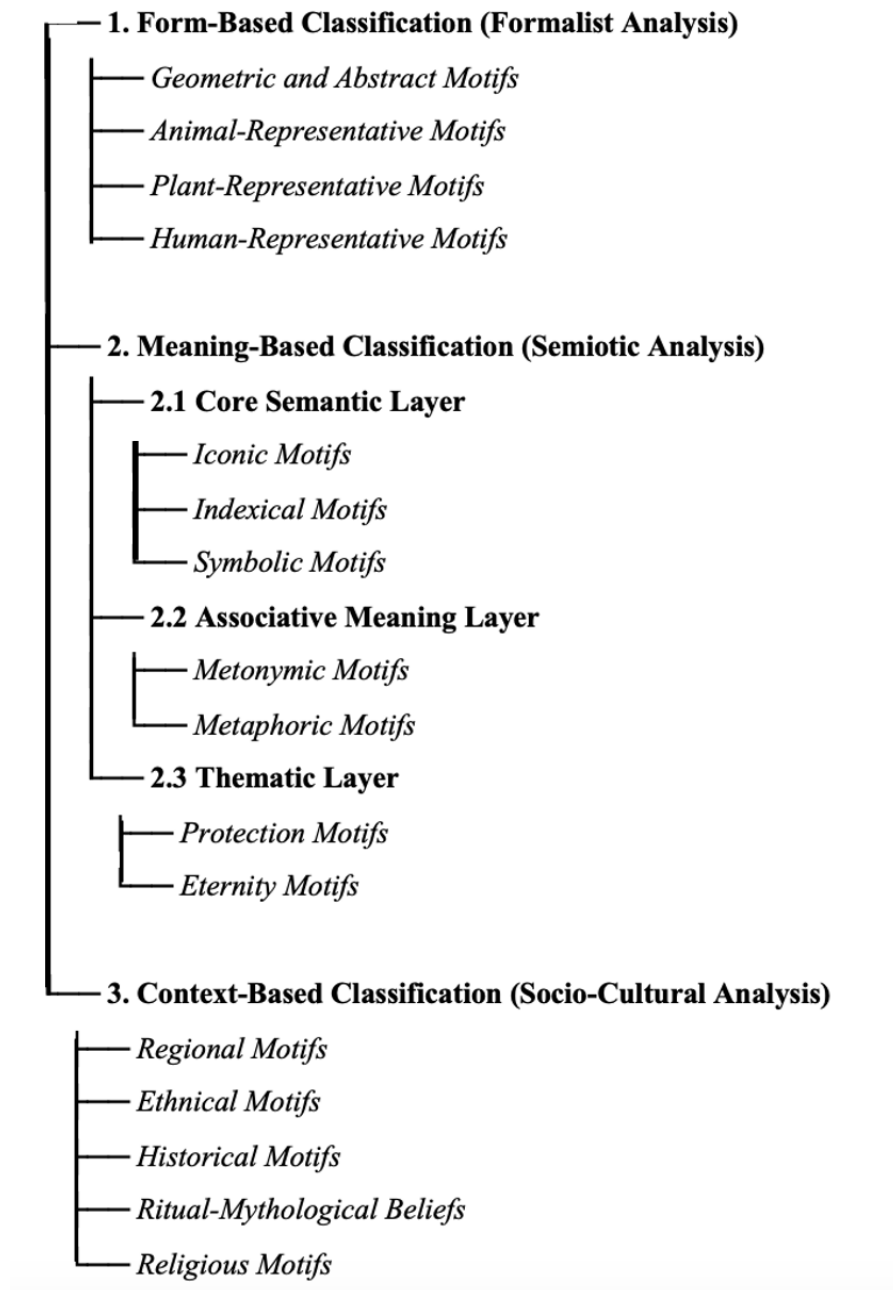
- (3) **Context-Based Classification (Socio-Cultural Analysis)**: Focuses on the structural and visual aspects of motifs, divided into:

- a. Geographical Identity
- b. Ethnic Identity
- c. Historical Background
- d. Ritual and Mythological Beliefs
- e. Religious Identity

The model presents a structured framework for categorising and interpreting kilim motifs by focusing on key elements of form, meaning, and cultural context. By providing a systematic classification and analytical layer, this model could serve as a practical tool for further research in the comparative study of kilim motifs across various regions, including

Iranian and Serbian kilims. Diagram 1 illustrates the proposed model for classifying and analysing kilim motifs.

Diagram 9: The Proposed Model for Classification and Analysing Kilim Motifs (Author)



5.5 Contributions and Recommendations for Future Research

At the end of this thesis, the following suggestions for future research on comparative kilim studies, particularly kilim motifs in Iran and Serbia, are proposed to further enrich our understanding of their cultural and anthropological similarities and distinct differences, as well as to discover new insights.

Expanding the Regional Scope of the Research: While this research was limited to a few regions in Iran and one region in Serbia, future research should include kilim motifs from other regions, from India to Central Asia, Anatolia, and the Caucasus, to gain a more comprehensive perspective and better objective results in analysing the motifs. They may share similar kilim

motifs due to historical and cultural relations with Iran, the Balkans, and Serbia. Consequently, by analysing kilims within these areas, researchers are able to trace the travel of symbols, styles, and techniques through ancient trade routes, most notably the Silk Road. Such comparisons can enhance our understanding of cultural interactions that had an impact on kilim design and how some motifs evolved in their various cultural contexts

Developing Comprehensive Classification Frameworks: Comparative studies require developing a standard and comprehensive model for classifying kilim motifs. This framework should include colours, forms, designs, and patterns, as well as weaving techniques, which are essential for interpreting their connotative meanings. The framework can help researchers detect and analyse kilim motifs in different regions more accurately. A comprehensive classification framework will also improve access to kilim design and motif studies and allow for the examination of similarities and differences in different traditions around the world.

Exploring Mythological and Historical Influences: Another direction for future research could be to study the mythological and historical roots of the motifs attached to beliefs, culture, and practices, as well as the historical events that played a role in the formation of kilim themes, such as migrations, wars, and trade relationships. For instance, studying how the interaction of the Persian and Ottoman empires shaped the common artistic heritage of the regions might well offer new insight into the common artistic heritage of these regions. A similar analysis of the cultural impact of the Ottoman Empire's expansion into the Balkans can show how political and social changes were represented in kilim design. These studies may connect the development of kilim art with significant historical and cultural events.

Integrating New Technologies in Kilim Analysis: New analytical tools, including artificial intelligence, can be trained to identify and classify patterns to analyse kilim designs with unprecedented precision. In addition, the creation of corpora and databases of kilim motifs will facilitate cross-regional comparisons and allow researchers to discover new connections and trends more efficiently. Technology can also make kilim studies accessible to a wider audience and promote a global understanding of this art.

Adopting Interdisciplinary Approaches: Combining methodologies from art, history, anthropology, and semiotics can provide new insights into the study of the kilim and its motifs and designs. For example, Anthropological approaches can be employed to identify and document how kilim motifs reflect the underlying values, beliefs, and preferences, as well as the daily life of the societies that wove them. In contrast, art historical analyses can more broadly contextualise these motifs within the frameworks of other artistic traditions. This interdisciplinary approach, when enhanced with digital tools, offers new interpretations of kilims as dual objects of art and cultural artefacts.

This doctoral dissertation, titled "*Cultural Anthropology and the Language of Symbols of Iranian and Serbian Kilim Art*" studied kilim motifs in Iran and Serbia within the theoretical and methodological framework of the research and contributes to cultural studies. Future studies will contribute to this research by taking a fresh look at the cultural significance of Kilims in today's world and examining how motifs are reflected in the contemporary space. In practice, in addition to the activities of theoretical researchers in the continuous study of this field, artists and designers can adapt these motifs, which have a rich mythological, historical, and cultural background, to their audiences and try to expand the use of these motifs in the arts and crafts of today's world.

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БИОГРАФИЈА АУТОРА

Solmaz Taghdimi је рођена 1981. у Техерану (Иран). По завршетку средње школе, положила је национални пријемни испит 2001. године и уписала Allameh Tabatabai State University, смер за Енглески језик – превођење. Након стечене дипломе основних академских студија, седам година је радила као наставник енглеског језика у средњој школи и у школама језика у Техерану, те хонорарно као превођилац. Положила је национални пријемни испит за мастер академске студије и уписала Alzahra State University 2010. године, смер Примењена лингвистика, модул Настава персијског као страног језика. Диплому мастер студија је стекла 2016. године. Од 2013. године предаје персијски језик у Иранском културном центру у Београду. Учествовала је у пројектима израде наставног материјала и тестова намењених студентима персијског језика. Коаутор је уџбеника „Пенџер” за персијски језик, чији је издавач Филолошки факултет Универзитета у Београду. Одбранила је други мастер рад, из области студија културе, 2017. године на Филолошком факултету. Ангажована је као страни лектор на Филолошком факултету од 2017. године. Њене сфере интересовања су настава језика и студије културе. Говори персијски, енглески, француски и турски језик.

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Cultural Anthropology and the Language of Symbols of Iranian and Serbian Kilim Art
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Студијски програм Језик, књижевност, култура

Наслов рада Cultural Anthropology and the Language of Symbols
of Iranian and Serbian Kilim Art (Културна антропологија
и језик симбола уметности иранског и српског ћилима)

Ментор др Александар Петровић

Изјављујем да је штампана верзија мог докторског рада истоветна електронској верзији коју сам предао/ла ради похрањивања у **Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Београду**.

Дозвољавам да се објаве моји лични подаци за добијање академског назива доктора наука, као што су име и презиме, година и место рођења и датум одбране рада.

Ови лични подаци могу се објавити на мрежним страницама дигиталне библиотеке, у електронском каталогу и у публикацијама Универзитета у Београду.

Потпис аутора

У Београду, _____

Изјава о коришћењу

Овлашћујем Универзитетску библиотеку „Светозар Марковић“ да у Дигитални репозиторијум Универзитета у Београду унесе моју докторску дисертацију под насловом:

Cultural Anthropology and the Language of Symbols of Iranian and Serbian Kilim Art
(Културна антропологија и језик симбола уметности иранског и српског ћилима)

која је моје ауторско дело.

Дисертацију са свим прилозима предао/ла сам у електронском формату погодном за трајно архивирање.

Моју докторску дисертацију похрањену у Дигиталном репозиторијуму Универзитета у Београду, и доступну у отвореном приступу, могу да користе сви који поштују одредбе садржане у одабраном типу лиценце Креативне заједнице (Creative Commons) за коју сам се одлучио/ла:

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