

Symbolism of Persian Rugs, Part Three

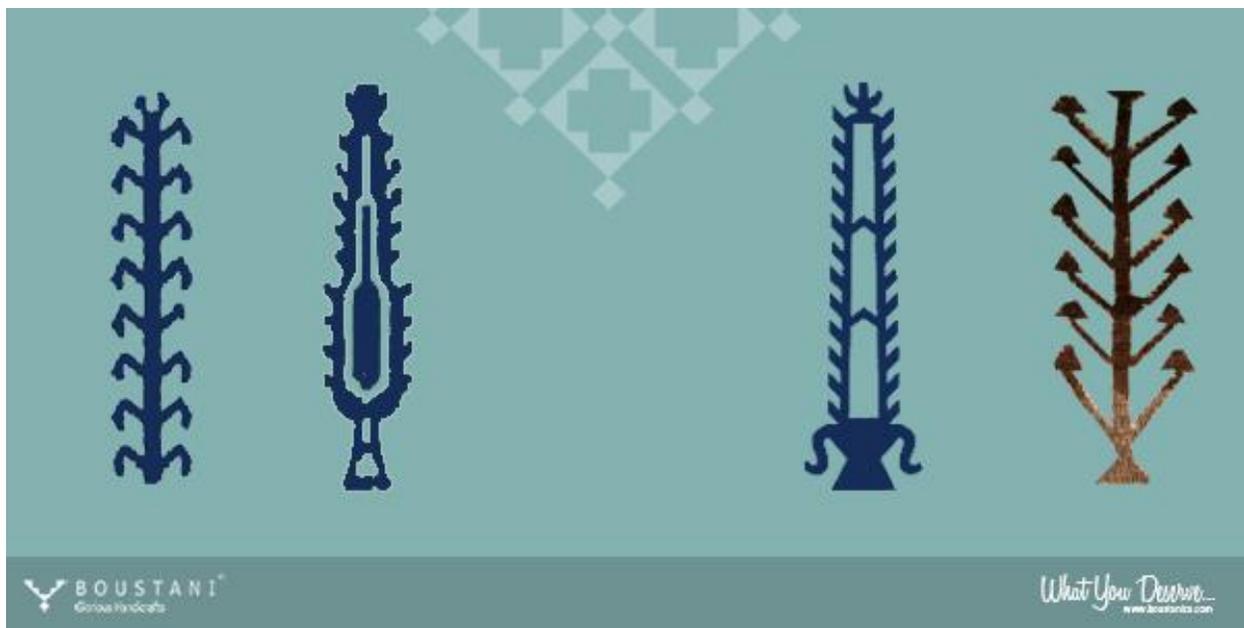
Motifs are derived from symbols that were used in ages gone by to inform, communicate and to convey ideas. Over time, some of these signs merged with myths, acquired hidden significance and moved into the world of esoteric symbolism. In this context, their use may not be limited to decorative purposes. Due to the hidden forces they are believed to imply, their primary purpose may well be psychological rather than aesthetic. Here is a comprehensive list of commonly used motifs in Persian rugs...

Tree of Life

The tree is the common theme for all religions believing in a single god. Its fruit which is believed to bring immortality, is forbidden to all mortals when the serpent waiting the tree had convinced Eve to eat it. Mankind, unable to eat the fruit of immortality, put all their hopes on the life after death symbolized by a tree of life.

Different cultures have used different plants such as cypress, date, palm, pomegranate, fig, olive, wine, beech and oak to symbolize the tree of life.

In Persian the prominent figure is a cypress tree. The birds on the tree of life is a widely used theme. They are the birds of life which will fly when the time comes. This theme is also used on the gravestones.



Star

The star motif on a Persian weaving generally means happiness and does not imply heaven for which a cloud, a dragon or a phoenix is used in many works including miniatures and other textiles.

The six pointed star generally known as the Solomon's Seal is being used in Persian since the time of the Phrygians who lived long before the time of Solomon. Therefore it wouldn't be wrong to deduce that it carries a meaning other than what is implied by Solomon's Seal. Taking into consideration the mother goddess statues where the star symbolizes the womb, it could be said that the motif is related to fertility.

Due to technical difficulties, star motifs having five points are used only on rugs. Usually star motifs have eight or more points as illustrated below.



Running Water

Since it has a great importance for mankind, the theme of running water is widely used on works of art. The pattern varies according to the material on which it is applied.

When carved on stone, it assumes an angular shape, while it is curvilinear or triangular on weaves as illustrated below.



Burdock

Burdock is a plant with burrs which stick to the clothing of people and the hair of animals.

It is believed to be capable of warding off the evil eye. On the other hand, the fact that the term "like a burdock" means full of flowers, accounts for the use of this motif on flour bags as a symbol of abundance. The illustrations below are taken from various burdock motifs used in Persian culture.

