The Principles of Ornament in Islamic Art and Effects of These Principles on the Turkish Carpet Art

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Abstract: Islamic art reflects art work which is formed by combining earlier art perception in muslims living areas with Islamic principles. Islamic art can be understood as a synthesis however, it has also its own originality. The main characteristic to reflect the originality of this art is ornament style. This ornament art is applied similarly in every Islamic art work. In this study, it is aimed to tell the reflections of Islamic ornament art into Turkish carpet art. The elements of ornament in Islamic art formed by various types of calligraphy, geometric shapes and rich vegetal motifs are applied to produced works according to certain principles. The principles are eternity, abstraction, symmetric and repetition, arabesque (interlaced ornament) and bordering. Most of these principles are used together on the forming stage of the works. The examples with basic characteristics of the principles of ornament in Islamic art have been seen on the Turkish carpet art. In this study the effect of Islamic ornament principles on Turkish carpets have been examined and explained with examples considering the historical development stages.

Key words: Carpet, Islamic, Islamic art, ornament, motif, Turkish carpet art

INTRODUCTION

The restriction of the use of figures in Islamic art has brought some decorative elements forward. These elements formed from vegetal based and geometric motifs and scripts of various characters have frequently been used in many areas of art such as stonework used in architecture, tile, gypsery, wood carving, marble work, metal art, textile and carpet weaving. In the production of such works of art, ornamental elements were applied according to certain basic principles, which are known as eternity, abstraction, symmetry and repetition, interlaced ornament (arabesque) and bordering. Each product involved some or all of these principles.

The influence of the principles of ornament in Islamic art is seen in the formation of the design of Turkish carpet art. With the acceptance of Islam and change in their beliefs, Turks’ conception of art also started to change. Throughout the historical development of the carpet art, the influence of this changed conception has become evident through the way how each motif has been positioned on the background of a carpet. Ornament similarity in Islamic art works formed with Islamic art perception has appeared in the carpet art.

When we study on Islamic art and ornament elements in Turkey and world we see that it is studied in various respects.

In the study, Baer (1998) has told the certain geometrical and figurative motifs used in Islamic ornament art with examples and described the usage of script in the ornament by means of examples and given information on ornament principles.

Can and Gün (2005) have explained the ornaments formed with geometrical, vegetal figures and objects and rumi and abstract forms and script under the title “Turkish Islamic Art” in their study. They have detailed about motifs in ornaments and historical development of by explaining examples used in important Islamic art works such as stone work, wood carving, metal work, miniature, tile work, calligraphy.

Burckhardt (2005) has enlightened us about historical development of carpet art and the importance in Islamic art under the title “carpet art” in which he told the birth of Islamic art, illustrations in Islamic art and perception of common ornament principles.

In her study, Etikan (2008a) has studied the usage of kufic script which is one of the element of Islamic art ornaments in Turkish carpet art. According to this study; As a result of the hindrances brought in against the use of some figures in the decorating arts in Islam, inscription gained importance in decoration and starting from the Abbasids period, it took place in the art of rug making. The kufic script, which was used in all the periods from the 13th century Anatolian Seljuk Rugs to the 19th century Hereke Rugs, was in the form of large kufic letters in the wide borders of the Seljuk rugs, but it gradually lost its letter characteristics and it was used in the form of motifs developed from the letters in the 14th and 15th century rugs with animal motifs. In the Early Ottoman Period rugs, on the other hand, it became a
decoration element in which sharp letters have taken a round form and connected to each other with plaits. This kind of kufic ornament, which is also known as the plait kufic style, was widely used in the border ornament of the 15th century Anatolian prayer rugs. Inscription also has an important place in the designs of Silk Hereke prayer rugs. In these prayer rugs, the square kufic script, a common type of the kufic script, has been used together with other script types to inscribe some of the verses on the prayer rug. The square kufic script, one of the important decorating elements of the Islamic architecture, has also been used in the borders of these prayer rugs in small medallions. To conclude, in our rug art, which was introduced to the Islamic world by Turks and then became an important part of the Islamic art, inscription has found a wide area of use as an important decorating element of Islamic art, and it has been used since Anatolian Seljuk rugs successfully, presenting rich varieties. However, in time, the kufic script and the motifs developed from it have also been adversely influenced by the changes in the traditional designs of our rugs due to various reasons.

In her study, Etikan (2008b) has studied certain motifs used in prayer rugs and studied on the place of these motifs in Islamic art. According to this study; Monotheism, which is the main principle of religion of Islam, has been the most important factor which gives a shape to Islamic art. Monotheism disapproves worship of idols besides it also disapproves drawings and statues to be considered as an idol. That’s why, art of drawing and statue has lost ground in Islamic art, whereas vegetal motifs, geometric motifs and also epigraphy have become commonplace in Islamic art. Besides of these, some holly items such as mihrap (mihrab), cami (mosque), and Kâbe (Kaaba) and some religious items such as kandil (candles) and ibrik (watering can) and hayat ağacı (tree of life), flowers in vase and fruits considered as paradise image have been used in vegetal motifs also animal figures considered as holly have been used in Islamic art and especially in prayer rugs as ornament element.

Etikan and Uzun (2009) have studied carpets seen in miniature works in the time interval said in their study under the title “carpets depicted in certain Ottoman miniatures with historical concept of 16. century” according to colour, motifs, and design characteristics.

As understood in the study above, it is drawn attention that only certain aspects of the subject were examined in the studies about the effects of Islamic art perception into carpet art. Generally, there is no study to examine all principles of Islamic arts ornament. This study is planned to overcome the lack of information. The main aim in this study is to explain basic of Islamic art ornament principles and present application forms of this principles in the carpet art by means of examples.

**PRINCIPLES OF ORNAMENT IN ISLAMIC ART**

**The principle of eternity:** Eternity principle is the main principle of Islamic decorative art. Motifs abstracted after being stylized according to this principle and arranged in a geometric order form the ornament of the work of art. While this is done, the starting and finishing points are arranged in such a way that one gets the impression that they do not exist. According to Çam (1997), this ornamenting concept represents in drawing the idea that God is Eternal, that is, It is an indefinite existence without a start or a finish. In the head page decoration of a Koran dated back to 1313 (Fig. 1), an arrangement in line with the principle of eternity in decoration can be seen. The stars and hexagons in the head page decoration of the Koran, which is kept in the Cairo National Library, was decorated with vegetal motifs which were placed as if they are continuing in four directions from the center: upwards, downwards, to the right and to the left. The following example clearly represents this ornament style, which is the foundation of the eternity principle and gives the impression that the starting and ending points are not known (Baer, 1998).

![Fig. 1: The head page decoration of a Koran dated back to 1313, Cairo National Library (Baer, 1998)](image)

**The principle of abstraction:** According to the essence of this principle, which is also described as “escape from realism”, objects in a work of art are not depicted as they actually look, but they are represented differently after being stylized. The goal of making such a change is not to distort objects and depart from the truth but to apply a different interpretation. The basic belief in Islam is that there is God behind every being and that humans are helpless against its infinite power. For this reason, the Islamic artist has refrained from using figures as he has strongly desired to avoid claiming equality to God, and...
thus, interpreted every object differently before transferring it to his work of art. As a result, with the obligation imposed by the belief, the principle of abstraction has entrenched itself in Islamic art. One of the best examples that represent abstraction principle is the ornament on a wooden lectern from 1278-9. In Fig. 2, the details of this lectern, on which delicate floral motifs were carved, can be seen. In this ornament, leaf and flower motifs were combined with branches, but it is not clear which actual plant was used to form it. Another example is presented in Fig. 3: the details of the decoration of a window casement of Ankara Kileci Mescidi. Here, too, there are animal motifs that are stylized to the point that one cannot tell what the actual representation was (Çam, 1997; Baer, 1998; Burckhardt, 2005; Can and Gün, 2005).

The principle of symmetry and repetition: Another decoration principle of Islamic art is symmetry. Symmetrical arrangements were mostly used in architecture. They were often considered in the plans and decorations of buildings. In the works of art in which geometric motifs were used, symmetrical decoration is noticeable at a first glance. At the balcony ornaments of the Alhambra Palace, this principle is evident (Fig. 4). In this decoration, which involves the use of floral motifs, geometric shapes and written script together, if the particular section of the structure were vertically divided into two pieces from the middle, the ornament on each piece would be similar. In Fig. 5, too, the effects of symmetrical arrangement can be seen in the ornament of the elephant footings placed in front of the altar of the Kurtaba Great Mosque.

On the other hand, the ornaments that floral motifs prevailed have not always been arranged symmetrically. In such works of art, to eliminate the lack of symmetry, an aesthetic repetition of the rhythm has been ensured so that the lack of symmetry cannot be noticed at a first glance (Fig. 6) (Burckhardt, 2005; Kubisch, 2007).

Arabesque (interlaced ornament) principle: In arabesque, rhythmical continuity is essential. This decoration style involves many regular shapes placed inside circular forms that are not marked with definite contours but can be recognized when looked at them; these shapes inside the circles then fluently turn into star-shaped polygons. As circles decorate the work of art with a rhythmical repetition, different arrangements formed at the connection points also create motifs with more circles and polygons. Figure 7 shows a geometric ornament with arabesque style on the head page of another Koran in the Cairo National Library, dating from 1370. The inside of the geometric shapes seen in the work is filled with vegetal motifs. Another example that depicts the arabesque best is the porcelain ceiling decoration of the Great Karatay Madrasah of Konya. There is a geometrical ornament which is formed with telescopic circles here (Fig. 8) (Baer, 1998; Burckhardt, 2005).

The principle of bordering (framing): This principle, which is frequently seen in Islamic decorative art, was first applied in Samarra and from there it spread to the Islamic world. In this principle, the surface of the work is first divided into various sizes of and mostly symmetrical sections, and then each of these sections are decorated with separate ornamental elements. In the decoration on the head page of the Koran dating from 1370 (Fig. 7), it can be seen that ornaments with different elements are formed in different sections divided by narrow borders. In the outermost border, motifs developed...
Fig. 4: Alhambra palace, balcony decoration, Granada, Spain (Burckhardt, 2005)

Fig. 5: Elephants footings in front of the altar of Kurtuba Great Mosque (Burckhardt, 2005)

Fig. 6: Relief plate from Toledo, 11th century (Kubisch, 2007)

Fig. 7: The head page decoration of a Koran dating from 1370, Cairo National Library (Baer, 1998)

Fig. 8: The porcelain ceiling of the Great Karatay Madrasah, 13th century, Konya -Turkey, (detail) (Burckhardt, 2005)

Fig. 9: The wooden ornament of the pulpit of Cuma Mosque, 16th century, Horasan - Iran, (detail) (Baer, 1998)

from the kufic script, which are also called the “plaited kufi”, are used. In the border towards inside, which forms the second section, vegetal motifs prevail. Finally, the square placed in the inside is covered with arabesque and the inside of the geometric shapes is ornamented with vegetal motifs (Baer, 1998; Hillenbrand, 2005; Blair, 2007).
Figure 9 shows a detail from the wooden ornament of the pulpit of Cuma Mosque. Here, too, the surface is divided into geometric sections and the ornaments made using the wooden technique are either scripts or vegetal motifs. The sections are separated from each other and framed by motifs called “zencerek” (Baer, 1998).

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PRINCIPLES OF ORNAMENT IN ISLAMIC ART ON TURKISH CARPET ART

Given the carpets that have survived up to date, the 13th century carpets of the Anatolian Seldjuk period, which are accepted to be the beginning of the Turkish carpet art, are large sized rugs thought to have been commissioned by the Sultans of the era to be woven for large, magnificent mosques. The general design compositions of these rugs involve the arrangement of geometric or vegetal motifs according to the principle of infinity. The flowers are stylized to the extent that they cannot be recognized. Figure 10 shows a Seldjuk carpet from Konya Alaaddin Mosque. The wide border of the carpet, which is placed between two narrow borders, is ornamented with the kufic script. In the middle background framed with the borders, eight-cornered stars are lined on shifted axes, making one think that they are continuing to infinity from the center to upwards, downwards, to the right and to the left (Aslanapa, 1987).

A descriptive example of the abstraction principle of Islamic art is another Seldjuk carpet found in Beyşehir Eşrefoğlu Mosque (Fig. 11). The vegetal motifs on the background of the carpet are depicted with another interpretation, remaining closer to the true representation. Still, it is not clear which flowers were used to create the motif. Furthermore, in this example, motifs are placed according to the infinity and repetition principles (Aslanapa, 1987).

In the continuation of the Seldjuk rugs, when the 14th and 15th century rugs with animal figures, which include powerful examples for a period of nearly 200 years, are examined, it can be seen that the use of figures involved a rigid stylization. Animal figures were abstracted in such a way that one cannot tell which animal was depicted. Figure 12 shows a West Anatolian rug that is thought to have been woven in the 15th century, and known as the Ming rug. The principle of dividing the background into squares and placing figures inside them is also observed in this small rug, as can be seen in most of the carpets with animal figures. This design form seen in carpets, which is a reflection of the principle of bordering in Islamic art, is also involved in the Ming rug as a division of the background into two squares. The depiction of the fighting dragon and phoenix inside the octagon in each square is not at first recognized as animal figures because of the way they have been arranged (Aslanapa, 1987).
Fig. 12: 15-century West Anatolian rug, known as the Ming rug (Aslanapa, 1987)

Fig. 13: Konya rug, Mevlana museum (Aslanapa, 1987)

Fig. 14: Konya rug, Mevlana Museum (Aslanapa, 1987)

Fig. 15: Uşak rug with medallion, 16th century (Aslanapa, 1987)

Fig. 16: Uşak rug with stars, 16th century (Aslanapa, 1987)

Fig. 17: Uşak rug shown in Fig. 17 is another type of this group and categorized as white-background carpets with birds. The motifs in it resemble birds at a first glance, but actually they are stylized leaf motifs. An examination of the motifs in the background of this rug and their arrangement shows that the principles of infinity, abstraction, repetition and arabesque have been used together (Aslanapa, 1987).

In another example of an Uşak rug with white background from the 17th century (Fig. 18), vegetal motifs were stylized to the extent that they cannot be recognized, thus the abstraction principle was applied. Moreover, with the arrangement style of the motifs, the infinity and arabesque principles were applied (Aslanapa, 1987).

Bergama rugs sustain the tradition of dividing the background into squares and the influence of the bordering principle of Islamic art is quite evident in them. In a Bergama rug from the 18th century (Fig. 19), the bordered middle background was divided into two squares, each of which included a rectangle with an octagon inside. Inside of these sections that have clear contours was ornamented with various motifs. In another Bergama rug from the 19th century (Fig. 20), nearly a square area was created in the middle, as the size of the
rug is small, and the corner motifs and the center motif were separated from each other with borders (Fig. 20). Inside the rhombus placed in the centre, a square was placed, and in this square, octagons placed in a telescopic manner were formed. Every area defined with borders was ornamented with motifs (Aslanapa, 1987).

In Turkish carpet art, the best examples of the principles of bordering and symmetry can be seen in the prayer rugs category. In Fig. 21, a Gördes prayer rug with double altars is represented. This model is known as “girl Gördes” as they are mostly woven for the dowry of a girl. If the patterns in the middle background were vertically divided into two, the motifs on both sides would be symmetrical. It is also observed that a bordering is placed on the background, considering not only the altar arrangement but also the part for verses and the part for the bottom of the feet. The symmetry and bordering principle is clearly seen in the 19-century silk Hereke prayer rug in Fig. 22, and in the rug represented in Fig. 23, which is another 19-century silk Hereke rug, repetition is seen on the altar background in addition to symmetry and bordering (Aslanapa, 1987).

CONCLUSION

Islamic belief influenced the artistic work of Islamic societies produced in different times and different geographies. The prohibition of drawing and sculpture
came under this influence, which resulted in refraining from using figurative and naturalist ornaments in Islamic works of art. Thus, the new conception of art produced by Muslim societies mainly involved vegetal motifs, geometric shapes and various written scripts. Ornamental elements containing these were used in decorating works of art, based on the principles of decoration, which are infinity, abstraction, symmetry and repetition, arabesque and bordering. These principles established a union of ornamenting in every area of decoration in Islamic art despite differences between materials, production techniques, etc. One of the art fields involving this union of ornamenting is the Turkish carpet art.

The influences of the ornamenting principles of Islamic art on Turkish carpet art are seen throughout the development of carpet-making art, starting from the 13-century Anatolian Seldjuk rugs. This study has presented examples from different periods and explained the application of the ornamenting principles in Turkish carpet art. In addition to their rich artistic value, Turkish carpets are of a great variety, too, and thus it is possible to increase the number of examples involving patterns using
the principles of Islamic art. In the creation of the pattern of each of these examples, at least one or a few of the ornamenting principles have been used.

REFERENCES
