

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

خوانش شمایل‌نگارانه فرش جنگ افغانستان
(مطالعه موردی: فرش جنگ با موضوع مجنون در هیئت احمدشاه مسعود)

is also published in this issue of journal.

Original Research Article

Iconographic Reading of Afghan War Rug (Case Study: The War Rug with Ahmad Shah Massoud as Majnun)

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Received; 05/05/2024

accepted; 06/01/2025

available online; 01/04/2025

Abstract

Arts are often influenced by significant political, social, economic, and cultural events within societies. One of the best examples confirming this notion is the Afghan war rugs. The designs of these rugs predominantly feature images of elements and motifs related to war. Among a subset of these rugs, there is a focus on depicting individuals influential in the course of the war. Ahmad Shah Massoud, as one of the key figures in the Afghan war, has been a recurring subject in Afghan pictorial rugs. However, in the rug analyzed in this study, Ahmad Shah Massoud is depicted alongside numerous elements that, at first glance, appear unrelated. This study aims to uncover the semantic connections between the various motifs present in the composition. This study seeks to answer the main question: what message is intended to be conveyed through the depiction of Ahmad Shah Massoud and the other elements present in this rug? The study examined one Afghan war rug featuring Ahmad Shah Massoud using Erwin Panofsky's iconology approach, employing an iconographic method in two stages of description and analysis. The study employed a descriptive-analytical methodology and used a library study for data collection. Through an iconographic approach and a semantic and symbolic analysis of the icons within the rug's imagery, the findings reveal that the rug implicitly conveys a message through the diverse elements included in its composition. The rug evokes the tale of "Layla and Majnun," with Ahmad Shah Massoud portrayed as Majnun—a world-renouncing lover of his country. The other elements in the rug symbolize the aspirations and dreams of the Afghan people, who long for a free nation.

Keywords: *Afghan Pictorial Rugs, War Rugs, Ahmad Shah Massoud, Iconography.*

Introduction

War is one of the significant concepts and themes that often manifests in the works of artists living in conflict-affected societies. As such, art, in all its forms, becomes an expressive tool for artists influenced by war, allowing them to convey feelings such as protest or resistance. Therefore, examining the political conditions of a society as the primary cause of this trend, along with the study of its cultural and artistic expressions, is essential to understanding its social realities.

One notable outcome of Afghanistan's prolonged wars is the emergence of a unique form of weaving known as "war rugs." The Soviet invasion of the late 1970s, which led to fierce Afghan resistance, found a fascinating expression on the canvases of these rugs. Influenced by over three decades of war, these rugs feature novel motifs derived from the concept of war, including weapons and other wartime symbols.

The rug analyzed in this study belongs to the category of Afghan pictorial rugs, featuring Ahmad Shah Massoud. This particular rug was selected because it not only depicts

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the portrait of Ahmad Shah Massoud but also incorporates a variety of elements alongside his figure. Given the multiplicity of elements in the composition that initially seem unrelated, a deeper study to uncover their interconnections appears necessary. The artist, by juxtaposing various elements and motifs, aims to convey an implicit message, and this study seeks to decipher that message.

One of the primary goals of this study, employing an iconological approach to examine the elements present in the rug featuring Ahmad Shah Massoud. The study seeks to address the following questions: What is the semantic relationship between Ahmad Shah Massoud and the various elements within the composition of the rug under study?

Research Method

Aligned with the qualitative nature of this study, it employs a historical, descriptive-analytical approach. The required data were collected through library research. The statistical population of this study consists of Afghan war rugs, from which one sample featuring Ahmad Shah Massoud was purposefully selected.

To address the research question, various methods could be employed. Given the nature of this study, which examines the semantic connections between elements within the composition, a portion of Erwin Panofsky's iconological approach—specifically iconography—has been utilized. In this study, the elements within the rug's composition are studied in two layers: describing the elements and analyzing their semantic connections, essentially adopting an iconographic approach.

In the first layer, a formal analysis is done and through the study of the elements and motifs in the text of the artwork, their primary and natural meanings are extracted. In the second layer, a secondary or contractual subject is studied. In other words, the relationship between the visual appearance of an element and the contractual form is studied. In this regard, in the first step, the elements in the text are described and explained, and in the second layer, the

semantic relationship between the elements in the text is analyzed.

Research Background

The reviewed studies in this study include sources related to studies on Afghanistan War Rugs:

Mahmoodi (2021), in the article “Rhythms of Life as Elements of Space Production in Afghanistan War Rugs Based on Henri Lefebvre's Views”, examines how space and rhythm are represented in Afghanistan War Rugs. The results indicate that the spatial representations in these rugs are an effort to assert existence within power relations.

Keyhanpour and Nemat Shahr Babaki (2017), in the article “War Rugs: A Loud Cry of Protest in the Language of Imagery”, investigate how these rugs are produced and created by ordinary and traditional people. The findings show that, in war rugs, traditional people reflect what they admire in daily life and what has harmed them, effectively voicing their protest against war through imagery.

Gholamzadeh Fard et al., (2016), in the article “Afghan War Carpets: Manifestation of Sacredness and Resistance”, examine the effects of over three decades of war on the indigenous art of Afghan carpet weaving. The results demonstrate that weavers of these rugs transformed the tragedy of war into a form of sacred art, creating works that symbolize resistance against war's devastation and express patriotism.

Gholamzadeh Fard & Khodami (2015), in the article “Examining the Reflection Theory in Afghanistan War Carpets”, study the impact of war on Afghan society and how it is reflected in the region's carpets. The results reveal that war not only inflicts irreparable damage to lives and property but also influences a nation's art and culture.

Keshavarz and Marasi (2012), in the article “A Study of the Evolution of Afghanistan War Rugs”, analyze the progression of Afghanistan War Rugs. The findings indicate that these rugs can be classified into three distinct generations since their inception.

Barmaki (2020) in the article “Patterns of Afghan Carpets from the Perspective of Visual Ethnography”, has studied and investigated the changes in the patterns used in Afghan

carpets with a visual ethnographic approach. The results of this research show that the motifs and designs used in Afghan carpets have changed under the influence of the political and social conditions of the society.

Despite the studies conducted on Afghanistan War Rugs and iconology, no research has examined Afghanistan War Rugs from an iconological perspective. Most existing studies on Afghanistan War Rugs have focused on classification and introduction. This study, with a novel approach, investigates the social and political contexts influencing the formation of a selected example of these rugs.

• Afghanistan war rugs

During wartime, society faces inevitable changes. At this stage, a duality of values emerges within society, comprising previous values and wartime or altered values. This duality reflects the relative nature of societal values. The impact of war on societal values is a key topic in the sociology of war. These values, influenced by war and shaped by various religious, political, cultural, or economic criteria, direct societal behavior in response to war. Such values manifest in different forms, such as sacrifice, selflessness, endurance of harsh war conditions, heroism in fighting the enemy, and more. Consequently, during wartime, new values arose based on new standards, aimed at justifying the conditions of war or defending against aggressors and outsiders. A significant feature of these values is their relative nature, as individuals in society hold differing perspectives on them (Ziaei & Safaei, 2010, 193).

Artists, influenced by wartime societies, convey these values through their artwork. Artistic creations serve as one of the quickest methods for transmitting messages, whether explicitly or implicitly. During this specific time, one of the most popular artistic themes was depicting bright horizons of victory or a future filled with hope, promising the end of darkness and despair. Artists often use indirect and allegorical approaches to convey their messages in artworks.

In Afghanistan, carpet weaving, like in other Asian countries, is a widely practiced craft among ordinary people. Farmers and villagers often engage in carpet weaving alongside farming and animal husbandry. Before the war, over 500 different types of carpets, in terms of color and design rooted in their

beliefs, were woven across Afghanistan. Afghan handwoven carpets were long regarded as some of the finest examples of Eastern rugs (Gholamzadeh Fard & Khodami, 2015, 6). Researchers believe that throughout history, carpets have been a medium where the worldview, beliefs, and mindset of weavers are reflected. The surrounding environment and mental space of the weavers have always had a profound impact on traditional and local carpets. The elements in carpet designs represent the events and occurrences of their society. By studying traditional carpet designs, one can understand the cultural contexts influencing their creation.

One of the common themes in Afghan carpets over the past few decades has been war. These carpets depict subjects related to the prolonged domestic and foreign wars in Afghanistan. The art of war closely aligns with the concept of war itself; war art emerges during wartime to convey the themes of war. Belief in life, people, destiny, and the future motivates artists to create works focused on humanity in war, known as war art. Essentially, war art narrates an external reality (Gholamzadeh Fard et al., 2016, 4).

Afghan pictorial war rugs are a newly emerged category of Afghan carpets, featuring motifs derived from the longtime wars of this region, such as airplanes, tanks, helicopters, and bombs. These carpets can be classified into three groups (Table 1).

In the first group, the traditional structure of the carpet design is preserved, but new motifs replace traditional ones. For instance, war-related elements like weapons and aircraft are incorporated alongside other motifs in a way that makes them difficult to distinguish at first glance. The designs are symmetrical and balanced, and this group relates to the Afghan-Soviet war period (Fig. 1).

The second group emerged after the war with the Soviet Union during the Najibullah Khan era. Carpets from this period often feature pictorial designs depicting war themes, such as the defeat of Moscow or representations of significant political figures. Many of these pictorial carpets also include satirical themes, protesting the prevailing societal conditions (Fig. 2). The third group of war rugs reflects events after September 11, 2001 (Fig. 3).

In a broader classification, Afghan war rugs can be divided

Table 1. Classification of War Carpets. Source: Authors.

	First group	Second group	Third group
Image			
Feature	The traditional structure of carpet designs has been preserved, with only new motifs replacing the traditional ones.	Pictorial carpets with the theme of war.	Pictorial carpets with the theme of events after September 11.

into two main types. Early examples adhere to the traditional framework of Afghan carpets, with only the war-related motifs replacing conventional designs. In later examples, the design framework shifts more towards pictorial carpets. The design and color schemes of Afghan war rugs are directly linked to contemporary events. In other words, no other woven artifact in history has reflected its contemporary events as thoroughly as Afghan war rugs (Keshavarz & Marasi, 2012, 67).

If Afghan war rugs are examined as an art form entirely dependent on and created by war, they can also be classified by content:

The first category includes rugs that depict war and its conditions directly through elements explicitly connected to war, such as tanks, weapons, and similar motifs. The traditional weaving method for these rugs involves the weaver representing whatever they observe in their surroundings. Alongside familiar elements, new motifs are added that ordinarily should not appear in the designs and have no relation to the weaver's life. The creativity of the weaver

in incorporating these motifs into the rug reflects their incongruity, symbolizing the disturbing presence of these elements in daily life in Afghanistan. For the weaver, these new motifs have essentially become symbols, representing a sense of hopelessness about changing the existing circumstances (Keyhanpour & Nemat Shahr Babaki, 2017, 226).

The second category depicts subjects that convey a sense of despair and disgust with the country's condition and war, using indirect and metaphorical methods. A theme favored by many artists is the use of mythological and national symbols from the country's culture and literature. By creating both positive and negative mythical symbols, and through the depiction of heroic images, the aim is to inspire national pride and patriotism, with the hope of halting or changing the current state of the country. In this heroic-national tone, the symbols are typically drawn from literature. Essentially, the artist uses a literary story or a specific character from a tale to convey a message inspired by that narrative.

War rugs are predominantly woven near Herat in northwestern

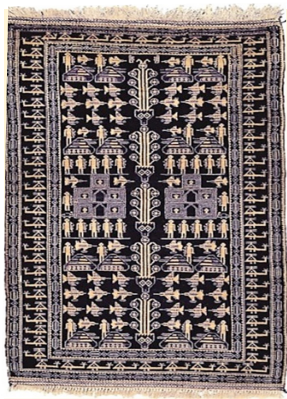


Fig. 1. Afghanistan war carpet, late 1980s, Private Collection. Source: Bonyhady et al., 2003, 13.



Fig. 2. Afghanistan war carpet, Najibullah Khan depicted as a puppet, in the early 2000s. Source: Spooner, 2011, 19.



Fig. 3. Afghanistan war carpet with the theme of September 11. Source: Bonyhady et al., 2003, 27.

Afghanistan. It appears that these rugs are created by members of tribal communities with a long-standing tradition of weaving. The most prominent weavers among these tribes are the Baluch, Turkmen, and Uzbek peoples (Gholamzadeh Fard et al., 2016, 9). According to the classification done, three examples of war carpets are given in the form of pictures in Table 1.

• **Introduction to the case study: Afghan war rug depicting majnun in the persona of Ahmad Shah Massoud**

The rug studied in this research is a second-generation Afghan war rug, with its central theme being one of the most significant and influential figures in Afghanistan's history—Ahmad Shah Massoud. Due to his role in the war and the popularity he enjoyed among the Afghan people, his image became an inspiration for Afghan weavers to create pictorial rugs. The rug under examination follows a mihrab (prayer niche) structure, featuring an inscription within the mihrab section. The texts woven into this rug make references to a story from Persian literature, namely Layla and Majnun (Fig. 4).

• **Iconographic reading of the case study**

In line with the theoretical framework adopted in this study—Panofsky's iconographic approach—the analysis of the case study has been conducted in two layers, presented as follows. Initially, the visual elements within the rug are described without considering their meanings and concepts. Subsequently, the symbolic and cultural significance of these components is explained in the context of society. In other words, the existing elements are analyzed based on their relationships and in pursuit of uncovering deeper meanings.

- **First layer: pre-iconographic description**

According to Panofsky's iconology approach, the first layer focuses on describing the tangible visual elements in the artwork. In this stage, the elements are described independently of their meanings or symbolism, addressing only their basic, straightforward interpretation (Nasri, 2013, 12).

The rug under study is one of Afghanistan's war rugs, which, in addition to incorporating depictions of war equipment and elements directly representing and recalling war, also portrays motifs that, while indirectly associated with war, played essential roles during the conflict. This rug, classified as a pictorial Afghan war rug, addresses the theme of war implicitly.

The rug's structure follows the mihrab (prayer niche) format. The icons present in the rug's imagery can be categorized into six groups: The first group is inscriptions. Two inscriptions appear in the form of framed panels. One inscription reads Layla and Majnun, while the other states The Blessing of Mystical Lovers. Both are positioned at the top section of the mihrab. The second includes sheepskin. At the upper part of the design, an image of a sheepskin is depicted. The third group includes human figures. Two human figures are woven into the rug. The first figure is seated on a throne on the right side of the design. The second figure, positioned on the left, is standing. This standing figure wears a hat, has its hands on its hips, and a bandolier with bullet cartridges across its waist, suggesting military attire. Notable facial features include the form of the individual's beard. The fourth group is flags. Two flags are depicted within the



Fig. 4. Afghanistan war carpet, Baluchi Style, Majnun portrayed as Ahmad Shah Massoud, early 1990s, (Afghan Private Collection). Source: Keshavarz & Marasi, 2012, 72.

design. The first flag, centrally located at a taller height, is tri-colored—yellow, red, and black (Fig. 5). The second flag, on the far-left side, is shorter and features green, red, and black stripes (Fig. 6). The standing human figure is placed between these two flags. The fifth icon is the royal throne. On the right side of the rug, a royal throne is depicted with an individual seated upon it. The sixth group of icons present in the rug is war equipment: The war-related elements in the rug include a weapon and a military vehicle. A military vehicle is illustrated in the lower half of the rug, while a weapon is centrally located near the middle of the design (Table 2).

- Second layer: Iconographic analysis

The second layer of image interpretation, based on Erwin Panofsky's theory, is referred to as iconography, where the symbolic meaning of the elements is examined. The artist, drawing from their cultural and societal context, conveys ideas through their artwork using symbols and signs rooted in their culture and society.

In this second layer of analysis, the focus is on uncovering the conventional and symbolic meanings of the motifs and visual components in the artwork. It involves examining and analyzing the relationships between the elements present in the rug's design. This approach seeks to uncover a deeper meaning embedded in the artwork, one that the artist intended to convey. At this level, the hidden content behind the apparent motifs is explored, which can reflect the social and historical values of the community (Nasri, 2013, 13).

The rug analyzed in this study dates back to the early 1990s, during the regime of Najibullah Khan. In Afghan history, Najibullah's government was officially designated a republic, but he was known as the leader of the Communist Party and a Soviet puppet in Afghanistan. As such, he lacked popular

support among the people. Najibullah came to power in 1986 (1365 SH), replacing Babrak Karmal, and his government fell in 1992. In late 1996 (1375 SH), he was publicly executed by the Taliban in the central square of Kabul (Hashemi & Colombani, 2009, 14).

In contrast, Ahmad Shah Massoud was a staunch anti-communist fighter and symbol of the Afghan Mujahideen's resistance against the Soviet superpower. Massoud's struggle was based on four principles: Islam, Afghanistan, the people, and freedom (Rigestani, 2011, 16). As a young man, Massoud was passionate about reading and was familiar with the works of prominent Persian literary figures such as Saadi and Hafez. He also had an interest in painting. He studied engineering at Kabul Polytechnic University, which was a hub for communist ideology at the time. For the Afghan people, Massoud became a symbol of resistance (Hashemi & Colombani, 2009, 42).

Massoud was known for his strict and cautious handling of public funds and resources. Throughout his years of struggle and jihad, he raised the flag of freedom over the heroic Hindu Kush mountains, shedding his blood in its defense, and earning the title of "National Hero." Massoud successfully led an unequal war against the Soviet Red Army until their complete withdrawal from Afghanistan. He overcame numerous military challenges and gained worldwide fame as a courageous and wise commander. During his life, Massoud owned neither land nor a personal home. After his martyrdom, he left behind only a few clothes and personal books (Rigestani, 2011, 27).

The standing figure depicted at the center of the rug, based on similarities in clothing, facial features, beard shape, and overall appearance when compared with the remaining photographs and images, represents Ahmad Shah Massoud.

Massoud's presence in the artwork, especially in the context of war rugs, conveys a symbolic and cultural message. His

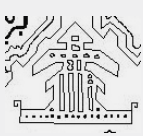
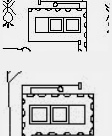
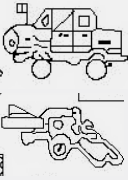

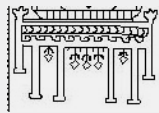



Fig. 5. Weimar republic flag. Source: Najari Sahlabad, 2011, 214.



Fig. 6. Afghanistan flag. Source: Najari Sahlabad, 2011, 47.

Table 2. Icons Used in the Carpet Text. Source: Authors.

Elements	Sheepskin	Flag	War equipment	Ahmad Shah Massoud	Throne	Inscriptions
Linear pattern						

portrayal as a central figure emphasizes his role as a hero and a symbol of resistance for the Afghan people. Through the rug's design and use of Massoud's image, the weaver not only commemorates his legacy but also highlights the broader themes of struggle, resilience, and hope for freedom within Afghan society.

What draws attention in the analyzed sample is the inscription Layla and Majnun in the prayer arch section, which alludes to the story of Layla and Majnun. This story is one of the classic romantic tales in Persian literature, where each of the main characters has become a symbol and icon. Over centuries, and through various retellings, the tale of Layla and Majnun has transformed into a stirring legend. Nezami, through a synthesis of all written and oral narratives and with the help of his vivid imagination, crafted a new version of the story.

In Layla and Majnun, love is portrayed as spiritual and pure. Nezami sought to infuse the story with mystical and moral overtones. Majnun, as the embodiment of the lover, is often depicted in visual arts as a figure who has renounced the material world, including worldly pleasures like food and sleep.

The content of this inscription, in the context of the theme of the rug, can be interpreted as a reference to Ahmad Shah Massoud. As a prominent political figure in Afghanistan's history, Massoud enjoyed immense popularity among the Afghan people and was regarded as a hero on a global scale. He dedicated a significant portion of his life to fighting for his nation, feeling the pain and suffering of his people deeply. Massoud loved his country and was always striving for Afghanistan's freedom (Hashemi & Colombani, 2009, 11). He was given the title "the ascetic soldier" (ibid., 113).

Ahmad Shah Massoud's simplicity and modest lifestyle

were described by his wife, Sediqa Massoud, as follows: "Our living space was limited to two small rooms in my parents' house. In the same room that my husband used as his workspace, we also ate our meals. Like most Afghans at the time, and many even today, our household belongings were very basic." (Ibid., 91).

The presence of the Layla and Majnun inscription on a war-themed rug conveys a concept that extends beyond a mere literary tale. Taking into account the other icons present in the composition, it can be subtly interpreted as a reference to Ahmad Shah Massoud. In other words, based on his life circumstances as described in historical accounts, Ahmad Shah Massoud can be seen as symbolically represented in the rug in the role of Majnun.

Another inscription in the prayer arch reads: "The Blessing of Lovers and Mystics," along with a sheepskin depicted in the design of the rug. "The sheepskin is among the ceremonial items of dervishes. Dervishes place the sheepskin on the ground when sitting or sleeping, and when traveling, they carry it over their shoulders. The dervish's throne, made from the hide of a sheep, deer, or sometimes a lion, tiger, or leopard, symbolizes poverty and simplicity. A dervish, who considers himself the king of the realm of poverty and contentment, regards the dervish's cap as his crown and the sheepskin as his throne, calling it the 'sheepskin throne' (Ahani et al., 2016, 125). Based on narratives about Ahmad Shah Massoud's life, in this rug, the sheepskin symbolizes his unpretentious life, simplicity, and asceticism. Indeed, the inscription "The Blessing of Lovers and Mystics" and the sheepskin are symbols within the rug's design that depict the life of a patriot who mystically and selflessly defended his homeland.

One of the most common motifs directly referencing war is military equipment, which is frequently used in Afghan war rugs. While sparingly utilized in this particular rug, the depiction of military equipment clearly alludes to the theme of war, aiding in a deeper understanding of the rug's content. Another significant icon in this rug is the depiction of two flags. The flag on the left, with green, red, and black colors, represents Afghanistan's flag during the Republican era under Najibullah Khan's government. The flag in the center of the rug, taller and featuring yellow, red, and black colors, represents the Weimar Republic's flag.

The inclusion of both the Afghan and Weimar Republic flags within the rug serves as symbolic representations, each carrying its unique interpretation. Afghanistan's flag, which changed over the past decades, eventually gets back to its traditional design. Its colors symbolize the country's tumultuous past: black signifies centuries of hardship and resilience in the face of foreign invasions, red symbolizes the struggle for independence, and green represents prosperity and success (Najari Sahlabad, 2011, 4).

The Weimar Republic's flag, with black, red, and yellow colors, was created as a national emblem to reflect the values of both democracy and nationalism in the newly formed Democratic Republic of Weimar (Storer, 2017, 80). What makes this comparison noteworthy is the historical context of the Weimar Republic itself. It was a transitional period between two German empires, marking the first instance of democracy in that region.¹ In the studies conducted regarding the relationship between the various elements used in this rug, what stands out the most, based on its title, is that Ahmad Shah Massoud is depicted as Majnun, standing beneath the flag of the Republic of Afghanistan, gazing toward Layli, who is seated under the taller flag—that of the Weimar Republic. The underlying implication of this image is a subtle reference to the era of Najibullah's rule, portrayed as a puppet government yearning or longing for the golden age of the Weimar Republic. In this depiction, Layli symbolizes the Weimar Republic. "The Weimar Democratic Republic represents one of the finest eras in Germany's history, with its flag also being a symbol of democracy" (Storer, 2017, 81).

In this study, based on the iconographic approach, the icons

present in the rug's composition have been analyzed. Within this approach, the first step involves describing the elements, followed by examining their symbolic meanings. Table 3 illustrates these two stages of interpreting the elements within the rug's composition.

In the analysis conducted on the rug's elements, the artist has arranged multiple components together to convey the intended concept. In the rug, which references the theme of war, the first elements directly pointing to war are two key components: weapons and a military vehicle, which explicitly address the subject of war. Other elements, however, relate to the theme of war implicitly through interpretation.

Table 3. Iconographic reading of Ahmad Shah Massoud carpet in two layers. Source: Authors.

A country's flag serves as a symbol and emblem of its identity. In this rug, the flags of two nations—Afghanistan and the Weimar Republic—are placed side by side. The Weimar Republic represents one of Germany's golden periods, widely regarded by the German people due to its establishment as a republic following a prolonged monarchy. During the era when Afghanistan was under the puppet regime of Najibullah, the Weimar Republic symbolized an ideal nation, with its flag included alongside Afghanistan's as a representation of this aspiration. The inscriptions within the rug's composition subtly reference the figure of Ahmad Shah Massoud. As a fighter and national hero, Massoud, through his bravery and sacrifices for his homeland, is portrayed as a lover of his country or symbolically as Majnun within the rug. One of the most significant icons used in the rug's composition is the sheepskin, which represents Ahmad Shah Massoud's modest lifestyle and simplicity. The sheepskin, traditionally associated with the humble lifestyle of dervishes, also serves as a symbol of their throne.

Conclusion

In this study, one of Afghanistan's war rugs was examined and analyzed using Panofsky's iconographic approach in two layers: description and analysis. This rug is among the pictorial rugs of Afghanistan that, influenced by the war, address a thematic subject. However, unlike other war rugs, it does not explicitly convey a message; instead, an implicit

Table 3. Iconographic reading of Ahmad Shah Massoud carpet in two layers. Source: Authors.

	First layer of reading	Second layer of reading
Description	In the first layer, the elements and components present in the text are interpreted:	The second layer pertains to the domain of conventional meanings:
	Inscription of Layla and Majnun	Majnun is a symbol of the lover, a figure who abandons the material world and neglects worldly pleasures. Ahmad Shah Massoud symbolizes Majnun.
	Inscription: “Blessed are the Lovers and Mystics”	Ahmad Shah Massoud is a symbol of a lover.
	Sheepskin	The sheepskin symbolizes a modest life, simplicity, and renunciation of the world.
	Ahmad Shah Massoud	The four key principles of Ahmad Shah Massoud were Islam, Afghanistan, the people, and freedom. He was an anti-communist fighter, a symbol of the Muslim Mujahideen’s resistance against the superpower Russia, and earned the title of “National Hero.” Massoud was also referred to as the “ascetic soldier.”
	Flag of Afghanistan	The flag represents every nation. The black in Afghanistan’s flag symbolizes hardships, the red represents war, and the green signifies success.
	Flag of the Weimar Republic	The flag of the Weimar Republic symbolizes democracy and nationalism. The democratic Weimar Republic is considered one of the best periods in Germany’s history. It serves as a metaphor for the rule of Najibullah, symbolizing a sense of longing or envy for the golden era of the Weimar Republic.
	Weapons	Symbols of war.
Military Vehicle	A symbol of war.	

message is delivered through the various elements depicted within the rug. The rug dates back to the era of Najibullah’s government—a regime that was ostensibly democratic but, in reality, was marked by Najibullah’s role as a Soviet puppet and his widespread unpopularity. During his rule, communism was heavily propagated throughout society under Soviet influence.

Ahmad Shah Massoud, a beloved figure and national hero, was consistently admired by the people. His beliefs were entirely opposed to communism, and he sought freedom for his country. As the leader of the resistance, Massoud was a staunch nationalist striving to create a free Afghanistan. In this rug, an effort has been made to use symbols to convey a meaning beyond the mere depiction of war. Although elements such as weapons and military vehicles are included in the rug’s composition, Ahmad Shah Massoud is portrayed as a Majnun-like figure, detached from worldly concerns and passionately in love with his country. Historical texts affirm that his unpretentious lifestyle was another indication of his Majnun-like character.

The use of symbols such as flags, which inherently represent nations, is present in this rug: the flag of Afghanistan during the era of Najibullah and the flag of the Weimar Republic. What lies behind these symbols is the golden era of the Weimar Republic, which served as the ideal and aspiration of the Afghan people, who, under the banner of the republic, sought a democratic government. The inscriptions Layli and Majnun and Blessings of Lovers and Mystics are a reminder of the story of Layli and Majnun, where this time, Ahmad Shah Massoud is depicted in the role of Majnun.

The sheepskin is one of the ritualistic items of dervishes; a dervish who considers themselves the king of humility, poverty, and contentment, viewing the dervish cap as their crown and the sheepskin as their throne, which is called the throne skin. In this rug, the sheepskin symbolizes Ahmad Shah Massoud’s simple, unpretentious lifestyle and his detachment from worldly concerns. In fact, the inscriptions Blessings of Lovers and Mystics and the sheepskin are symbolic elements within the rug, depicting the life of a patriotic lover who, in a mystical and dervish-like manner, defended his country.

Endnotes

1. Due to the presence of the Weimar flag in the studied example, it is necessary to examine the history of Germany, the formation of the Weimar Republic, and its connection to the subject of the carpet in question. The North German Confederation was the official name for Prussia and the German principalities that formed a unified state until 1871. In 1871, after France's defeat by Prussia, the term "German Empire" became prevalent. From that year until 1918, when Germany was defeated in World

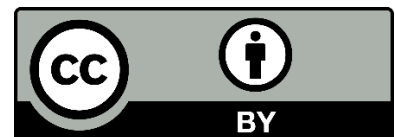
War I, it was known as the Second Reich. After World War I, from 1919 to 1933, Germany became known as the Weimar Republic due to its system of government and constitution, which were established in the small town of Weimar. This government is considered the first democratic republic in Germany. However, from 1933 to 1945, when Hitler came to power, Germany was referred to as the Third Reich (Najari Sahlabad, 2011, 218).

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Ahani, L., & Yaghoubzadeh, A. (2025). Iconographic Reading of Afghan War Rug (Case Study: The War Rug with Ahmad Shah Massoud as Majnun). *Journal of Art & Civilization of the Orient*, 13(47), 48-57.

DOI:10.22034/JACO.2025.455798.1406

URL:https://www.jaco-sj.com/article_214222.html?lang=en

