



Design Analysis of the Weavings on the Elephants Used in the Miniatures of "Akbarname"

"Akbarname" Minyatürlerinde Kullanılan Fil Üzerindeki Dokumaların Tasarım Analizi

ABSTRACT

The late 17th and early 18th centuries represent the peak period of the Mughal Empire, which was founded by Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur in 1526. The Mughals frequently adorned their elephants with elaborate decorations. Among the adornments for elephants were items such as elephant caps, 'teyya' (elephant veils), 'mukut' (elephant crowns), large and ornate panels prepared for festivals to be placed on the elephant's head, hats, lion figurines to be placed on the forehead, 'renpiyel' (forehead bands), forehead jewellery, 'tikka' (forehead medallions), 'nettippattam' (triangular forehead covers made of copper and gold alloys), 'seeri' (textile head and back covers), 'fateh-pech' or 'kader-pech' (earrings for the trunk), 'jhumar' (forehead jewellery), decorative handkerchiefs, ox tail tassels, and 'bengri' (band worn on ivory). This research paper analyses the design elements and principles of the textile products known as 'seeri' (textile head and back covers), specifically examining the elephant back covers. The study aims to contribute to the literature by demonstrating how these textiles were used as decorative elements during the Mughal era and how they resemble contemporary textiles.

Keywords: Miniature, Art, Design, Weaving, Mughals

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INTRODUCTION

The late 17th century to the early 18th century represents the zenith of the Mughal Empire, established by Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur in 1526. During this period, the estimated population of the empire ranged from 110 to 150 million. Its dominions included present-day Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh (K, 1968). The Mughal Empire was an absolute monarchy governed by emperors (Richard, 1993). The empire primarily sustained itself through agriculture (Schimmel, 2004; Roe, 1926). Its revenue system relied on the 'zamindari' (land) system, where land taxation served as the primary source of income, collected from peasants cultivating the land. Tax officials known as zamindars determined and collected taxes on behalf of the empire (Sharma and Patterson 1999; Schimmel, 2004).

To ensure control over its vast territories, the Mughals established a robust military system, including the emperor's army, Mughal nobility, cavalry, infantry, and artillery units. Military strength played a crucial role in safeguarding the empire's borders, suppressing revolts, and expanding Mughal territories (Roe, 1926). The Mughal emperors were individuals with a profound appreciation for and interest in the arts, culture, and civilization, and they played a crucial role in fostering the development of art and culture during their era. Emperor Akbar and Jahangir, in particular, contributed to the structure and foundation of art schools in India (Fincham and Beach, 2006). The Mughal era witnessed the development of significant art forms, including, motifs, patterns, calligraphy, and miniature art.

The Mughal rule came to an end with the "Indian Rebellion of 1857", as a result of British intervention (Pearson, 1976). In cities such as Fatehpur, Agra, Sikri, and Lahore, Mughal carpet weaving was especially renowned. The term *Karkhanas Farrash khana* referred to the workshops where carpets, rugs, and tent weavings were crafted by specialized artisans (The Women of Mughal Harem, 2020:83). Saddlebag fabrics are the leading fabrics used for transportation and storage purposes (Kılıçarslan, 2019:128). Apart from Anatolia, in Turkish Republics and other Turkish tribes, bags and saddlebags are also called "horjun, horcun, korcun" (Ölmez and Etikan, 2014: 58).

Known as Mughal carpets, these carpets were used as floor coverings in court settings (Khana, 174). Dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, these carpets and rugs feature a blend of Persian, Indian, and Turkish art, including floral and animal motifs and natural landscapes (Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art & Architecture, 95). The knot density in these carpets is approximately 300 knots per square centimetre (Walker, Daniel, Karadağ ve Böhmer,

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Enez, 1997:117, 183, 185, 196). These carpets were also diplomatic gifts given to foreign statesmen (Arslan, 2018: 696).

Mughal emperors often adorned their elephants. According to Kansoy, the adornments for the elephants included various items such as elephant caps, *teyya* (elephant veils), *mukut* (elephant crowns), large ornate panels prepared for festivals to be placed on the elephant's head, hats, lion figurines to be placed on the forehead, *renpiyel* (forehead bands), forehead necklaces, *tikka* (forehead pendants), *nettipattam* (triangular forehead covers made of copper and gold alloys), *seeri* (textile head and back covers), *fateh-pech* or *kader-pech* (earrings for the trunk), *jhumar* (earrings), decorative handkerchiefs, ox tail tassels, and *bengri* (ivory rings) (Kansoy, 2023:564). This research paper focuses on analysing the design elements and principles of the textile products used as elephant back covers, known as *seeri*, specifically examining their aesthetic aspects. The research aims to contribute to the literature by highlighting how these textiles were used as decorative elements during the Mughal era and their similarities with contemporary textiles

Motifs, Patterns, Colors, and Compositional Features used in the Mughal Empire

The examination of motifs, patterns, colours, and compositional features utilized in the ornamentation and designs during the Mughal Empire period can be derived from the analysis of miniatures encompassed in the book titled 'Akbar-nama', which includes miniatures spanning the era. The English translation of the first section of Akbar-nama, which surfaced in 2015, was edited by Wheeler M. Thackston (Damrosch, 2003).

The biography of Akbar, 'Akbar-nama' was authored by Abu'l-Fazl ibn Mubarak al-Allami (d. 1011/1602) (Fazl, 1602). Emperor Akbar (1542-1605) was the third ruler of the Mughal Empire, reigning between the years mentioned. The author of the book, Abu'l-Fazl, was a significant member of Akbar's court, a historian, and chief advisor to Emperor Akbar. He also served as Emperor Akbar's chief minister and was considered one of his trusted and empowered individuals. Abu'l-Fazl was concurrently one of the "Navaratnas" or "Nine Jewels" in Emperor Akbar's court (Gascoigne, 1979).

'Akbar-nama' provides detailed information about the cultures of the time, including Turkish, Persian, and Indian cultures. It narrates how Emperor Akbar skillfully blended these different cultural elements throughout his reign. The fusion of cultures and the emperor's efforts to promote cultural harmony have become a significant point of interest and attraction in the literary field (Massini, 1994).

'Akbar-nama' functions as a record of the reign, akin to a registry of events organized chronologically by dates. It could also be regarded as a compendium of imperial decrees; however, despite these aspects, it can be considered a literary work due to Abu'l-Fazl incorporating his own perspectives into it (Mukhia, 2020). Works of this nature were traditionally written to praise the ruler and describe the beauties of the era. Abu'l-Fazl had access to all the palace resources while writing 'Akbar-nama', thus incorporating numerous official reports, decrees, and archive files into the work. Additionally, he included his own memoirs in the composition.

Upon analyzing these miniatures, it becomes evident that floral and plant motifs were frequently employed. Plant motifs played a significant role in the ornamentation of textile products (carpets, tents, clothing, elephant and horse covers, etc.) and architectural embellishments (Koch, 1997). Geometric shapes such as straight lines, circles, squares, triangles, and repeated geometric patterns were used in architectural decorations and decorative artworks. Animal motifs like lions, tigers, deer, and birds held prominence in paintings and ornamentations (Shapland, 2009). Circular motifs, undulations, knots, and intricate arabesque patterns are seen in fabrics, ceramics, and manuscripts.

Miniature art, a genre of painting that experienced significant development during the Mughal Empire, it depicts historical events, mythological stories, and scenes from sacred texts. Noteworthy characteristics of miniatures from this period include detailed and intricate craftsmanship. The vibrancy of colours, the use of perspective, and the emphasis on details distinguish the miniature art of the Mughal Empire (Koch, 2001).

During the Mughal Empire, motifs, patterns, calligraphy, and miniature art contributed to a cultural and artistic richness. These art forms reflected the empire's aesthetic sensibilities and have endured as a significant heritage to the present day.

The Characteristics of Miniatures Found in Akbar-Nama

The miniatures associated with Akbar-nama form a rare collection depicting the life and era of Emperor Akbar. These precious artworks are currently housed in the "South and South East Asia" collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the "Indian Collection" exhibition at the Chester and Beatty Museum in Dublin. These miniatures present a chronological biography of the period of Emperor Akbar, offering valuable insights into

the clothing styles, social structure, and artistic content of the era. Akbar-nama comprises a total of 116 well-preserved miniatures, providing detailed reflections on Akbar's governance, court life, wars, and the societal fabric of the time.

These miniatures have been inventoried by museums, and pertinent information has been provided. Among the details, it is mentioned that the miniatures are painted on light Brown opaque watercolor paper using transparent watercolors and gold paint. The miniatures are executed in a portrait style. The 116 miniatures are grouped into two categories, with dimensions of 435 mm x 260 mm and 320 mm x 190 mm. The miniatures in Akbar-nama were created in the 1590s by talented artists of Persian and Indian origin under the patronage of Emperor Akbar. Some notable miniature artists involved in creating the Akbar-nama miniatures include Basawan, Abd al-Samad, Daswant, Miskin, KesuDas, Lal, and Kesu. The fine lines, vibrant colors, and intricate patterns in the miniatures showcase the skill and mastery of these artists.

In this research, our aim is to analyze the motif, pattern, color, and composition characteristics of textiles used on elephants in the miniatures found in Akbar-nama using design elements and principles. We intend to create drawings and compile a catalog, providing a different perspective to future designers.

Similar to many Turkic-Islamic States that established dominance in the Indian geography during the rule of the Baburs, elephants played a significant role, finding widespread use. According to Babur-nama, during the Babur period, Indians referred to those who rode elephants with a seat around the elephant's neck as "filban" (elephant rider) in Persian, and the elephant itself was called "hâti" (Babur, 2000:442). Filbans, in times of peace (hunting and elephant fights) or in times of war, were equipped with armor and weapons, much like a soldier. To control and move elephants forward, Filbans used an iron tool with one end curved and the other end straight or pointed. This hook-shaped tool was expressed as 'tottra' and 'añkuṣa' in ancient Hindi (Kansoy, 2020:408-409).



Visual 1: 17th century, Geobagh (Elephant Goad) Appearance of the device named. Source: 'Mughal', <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453339>, Access date: 19.10.2023.

Design Analysis: Each elephant had different names based on the Emperor's perceived abilities, colour, movements, and appearance. These names were predominantly chosen in Persian and Hindi. Some examples include Evreng-gaj (Head of Elephants), Dil-pesend (Heart's Delight), Manik-surat (Pearl-like), Hâlik-dâd (God-given), Bülend (High), Dil-i-diler (Heart of Hearts), Dilküşâ (Heart-pleasing), Sundar-gaj (Proud), Dal-singar (Army's Ornament), Zelzele (Earthquake), Mah-i-ru (Moon-faced), Payitaht (Capital), La'l (Red), Huş-raftar (Good Carrier), and in Hindi; Nar Sing (Male Lion), Feth-i-ceng (Victory in Battle), Bagh-mar (Tiger Slayer), among others (Manucci, 361-362).

In his work 'Akbar-nama', Abu'l-Fazl categorizes elephants into four groups. These are Mirg (white-skinned with black spots and white eyes mixed with black and yellow), Mand (wild elephants with black skin and yellow eyes), Mirg (easily obedient with a small head), and Bhaddar (erect-headed, large-eared, long-tailed, and proportionate body) (ibid, 118). Although specific information about when and where the filkhana (elephant stable) was established is not provided in Babur-nama, using the information from the same source, it can be suggested that this organization might have been established during the reign of Emperor Babur. Miniatures in Babur-nama document the use of elephants by Babur Shah even before his rule in India (Som, 2016:90-92).



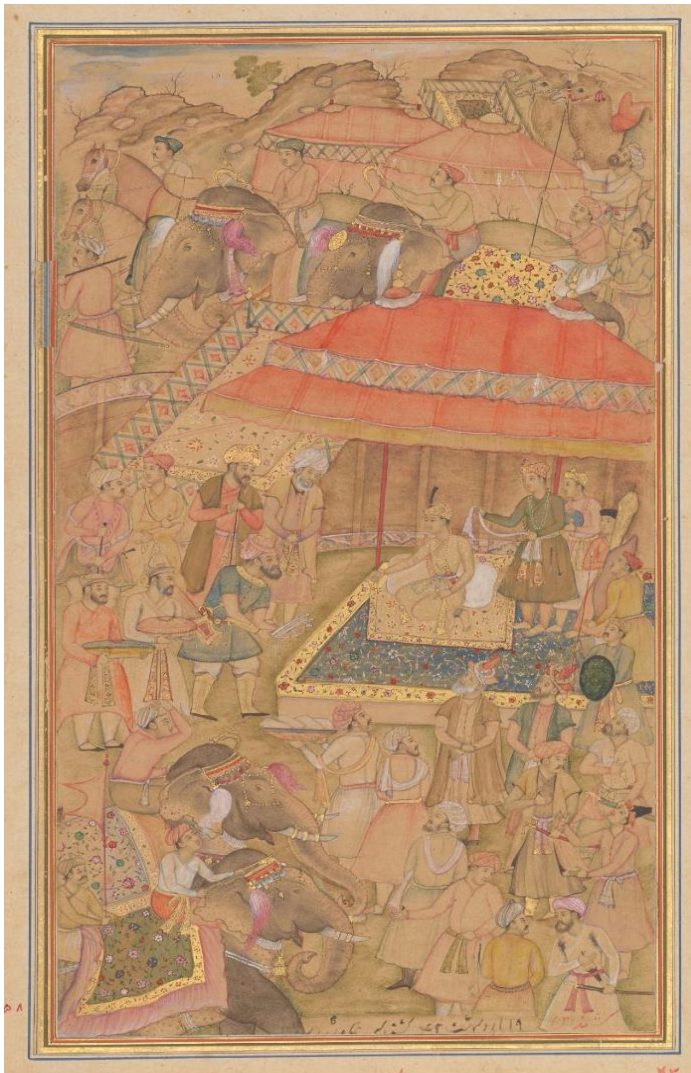
Visual 2: <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9420/painting-sarwan/> Access date: 01.10.2023.

Design Analysis: In the second visual, the textile on the elephant features borders that are left plain. The central area is filled with a floral design made up of 'hatayi', 'penç', and spirals. The repetition principle is emphasized through the use of 'penç' and 'hatayi' motifs of the same size and exact design. The use of both warm and cool colours creates colour contrast within the design. The principles of harmony and unity are present in the central area.



Visual 3: Inventory number: IS.2:50-1896, Akbar-name, Victoria Albert Museum, London . <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9670/munim-khan-and-khwaja-jahan-painting-basawan/> Access date: 20.10.2023

Design Analysis: In the third visual depicted in the image, the borders of the textile on the elephant are left plain. The central area features a floral design composed of ‘penç’ motifs in varying sizes, interspersed with a spiral created by a free-form cloud motif. The monotony caused by the repeating motifs is broken by this spiral. The balance between large and small motifs is particularly striking, with larger motifs emphasized by using light colours on a dark back ground. The contrast in the design is further enhanced by the use of light and dark colours in the border area. The free-form cloud motif refers to cloud shapes that are placed freely on the design surface.



Visual 4:Inventory number: 03.27, Ekbername, ChesterBeatty Museum, Dublin.https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/image/In_03_27/2/LOG_0000/Access date: 23.09.2023.

Design Analysis: The image features two elephants, each adorned with textiles that are identical in pattern. The only difference between the two compositions lies in the ‘hatayi’ motifs used. The ‘hatayi’ and ‘penç’ (paw) motifs are connected by a spiral design. A distinctive feature of these textiles, compared to others, is that they consist of two borders and a central area. The outermost border is left as a plain, solid-coloured frame, while the second border is formed by the side-by-side arrangement of ‘penç’ and leaf motifs. The textile on the upper elephant is composed entirely of cool colours, resulting in a monotonous effect in the design. In contrast, the textile on the lower elephant incorporates both warm and cool colors, adding contrast and dynamism to the design.



Visual 5: Inventory number: IS.22:-1896, Akbar-name, Victoria Albert Museum, London .<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9403/Ekber-Şah-painting-basawan/> Access date: 26.09.2023.

Design Analysis: In the design, the back ground is left blank, while the border features motifs of ‘penç’ (paw) and leaves scattered across a light colour base, using the same light colour. Throughout the composition, contrast is created by using both light and dark colours.



Visual 6: Inventorynumber: 03.59,Akbar-name, Chester Beatty Museum , Dublin.https://viewer.cbl.ie/viewer/image/In_03_59/2/LOG_0000/
Access date:04.08.2023.

Design Analysis: In the textile pattern used on the elephant in visual number six, the pure prayer rug model is applied. Mihrabs of equal size are arranged side by side and stacked vertically, which adds a sense of monotony to the design. Small, differently colored dots are placed on the mihrabs. The border is separated from the inner area by using a warm color.



Visual 7: In 1562, Akbar was on a pilgrim's journey to visit the tomb of Mu'in ad-Din Chishti in Ajmer. IS.2:23-1896. <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9409/Ekber-Şah-painting-ikhlas/>. Access date: 04.07.2023.

Design Analysis: In this visual, the elephant is adorned with a composition framed by borders, featuring floral motifs. The motifs used, such as hatayi and penç, are connected by a spiral design. The variation in the size of the motifs adds movement to the composition. The border and the inner area are distinguished by contrasting colours—warm red and cool light green—adding a sense of contrast to the design.



Visual 8: Inventory number: IS.2:81-1896, Akbar-name, Victoria Albert Museum, London , <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9597/akbar-painting-basawan/> Access date: 02.09.2023.

Design Analysis: In visual eight, the textile patterns placed on two elephants are observed. The pattern on the first elephant is entirely composed of an open composition. The design consists of thin and thick stripes, with the variation in stripe width, adding movement to the pattern. While some stripes feature a series of floral motifs, others are filled with interlocking elements arranged in succession. This variation introduces movement to the design but disrupts the principles of unity and harmony. The colours used in the composition also lack harmony. Cool colours are placed in sequence, while warm colours are grouped, creating a contrast within the pattern.



Visual 9: Inventory number: IS.2:117-1896, Akbar-name, Victoria Albert Museum, London .<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9411/Ekber-Şah-painting-farrukh-beg/> Access date: 20.10.2023.

Design Analysis: The textile pattern on the elephant depicted in the visual numbered nine has a composition reminiscent of a carpet design. In this pattern, a large stylized heart motif is placed in the central area. Spirals formed from free cloud motifs emanate from the heart motif, moving to the left, which demonstrates the use of directional elements in the design. The symmetry of the motif is mirrored and placed in reverse at the beginning of the textile. The remaining spaces are filled with ‘penç’ motifs of varying sizes. The larger ‘penç’ motifs are emphasized by using cool colors on a warm back ground. The motifs and colors used in the central area are also employed in the border section, aiming to incorporate the principles of unity and harmony within the design.



Visual 10: Inventory number :IS.2:20-1896, Ekbername, Victoria Albert Museum , London . (<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O9318/ali-quli-bahadur-khan-and-painting-kesav-kalan/> Access date: 16.11.2023.

Design Analysis: In the visual numbered ten, the design on the elephant typically features the ‘köşebent’ pattern technique, commonly used in the art of ‘tezhip’ (gilding). The central area is decorated with ‘hatayi’ motifs arranged using a scattering technique. The interior of the ‘köşebent’ is filled with a floral design created by connecting ‘goncagül’ and ‘hatayi’ motifs with spirals. The border area has been left empty. The border and the background are distinguished from each other by the use of warm and cool colours, indicating the application of the principle of contrast through colour. When observing the overall composition, the motifs used in the central background and those in the ‘köşebent’ are entirely different from each other. This demonstrates that the principles of harmony and unity were not adhered to in the design. The ‘köşebent’ refers to the chained decorations made with gold leaf between two lines on the edges of the book cover (Mutlu, 1966:55).

CONCLUSION

The miniatures in the Akbarnama, a rare collection that depicts the life and times of Emperor Akbar, are invaluable works of art. Today, these precious pieces are housed in the "South and South East Asia" collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and the "Indian Collection" exhibition at the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin. Upon examining these miniatures, it is evident that floral and botanical motifs were frequently used. Such vegetal motifs played a significant role in textile products (carpets, tents, clothing, elephant and horse covers, etc.) and in the decorations of architectural structures.

During the Mughal period, adorning both palace elephants and war elephants became prominent. The decorative items for elephants included: elephant hats, teyya (elephant veils), mukut (elephant crowns), large decorative panels and hats for festivals, lion statuettes for the forehead, renpiyel (forehead bands), forehead jewelry, tikka (forehead medallions), nettipattam (triangular forehead covers made of copper and gold alloy), seeri (textile head and back covers), fateh-pech/kader-pech (trunk earrings), jhumar (earrings), decorative hand kerchiefs, yak oxtails, and bengri (ivory rings). This research article, for manageability, focuses only on the seeris (textile head and back covers) and specifically analyzes the textile back covers of elephants through design elements and principles. To avoid repetition, nine different miniatures featuring elephants from the Akbarnama were selected. Design

elements and principles such as repetition (Visual -2), contrast (Visual -5), rhythm, unity (Visual -2), harmony (Visual -2), and movement (Visual -2) were observed. In the pattern compositions, techniques like the scattering technique (Visual -10), open composition (Visual -8), pure prayer rug model (Visual -6), and corner motif technique used in tezhip art (Visual -10) were identified. The analysis revealed that the composition features of the textile products depicted on the elephants in the miniatures show significant similarities to contemporary weaving patterns. This demonstrates that during the Mughal Empire, motifs, patterns, calligraphy, and miniature art created a rich cultural and artistic heritage. These art forms reflected the aesthetic sensibilities of the empire and have endured as an important legacy to this day.

Our primary duty is to preserve these artistic works that have come down to us from the past and to elevate them to a higher level by drawing inspiration from their designs.

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