

## **“DEATH” SYMBOLISM IN TURKISH WEAVINGS**

**Filiz Nurhan OLMEZ**

Dr. Suleyman Demirel University,  
Faculty of Fine Arts Department of Traditional Turkish Handicrafts,  
<http://filiznolmez.sitemynet.com>, [fnozan@hotmail.com](mailto:fnozan@hotmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The fact of “death” has been reflected in many weavings such as carpet, *kilim*, *jejim*, *zili*, *soumak* as both motifs and drawing compositions formed by gathering of motifs, and as possessions such as “weavings made and kept for burial” in Turkey. Carpets and kilims are produced to meet not only the physical needs of people but also their psychological expectations. When the emotions could not have been spoken and were to be expressed in a silent way, motifs were gathered in different colors and techniques and magnificent weavings came into existence. Each one of the motifs of the carpets and kilims has been weaved for thousands of years and has become the art of our ancestors. In this article, we have studied the fact of “death” which is reflected into Turkish weavings under the headlines of “motifs that directly symbolize death”, “motifs related to death” and “weavings made and kept for burial”. The research concluded that the motifs which directly symbolized death were *bird*, *ram*, *sheep*, *horse*, *knife*, *cypress*, *chest*, *poppy*, *leaf*, *earring*, *deer*, *ewer*, *centipede*, *yel egdi* (*wind curved*). In addition, information was gathered about the tradition of a special weaving, “made and kept for burial”, and examples were given for the specifications in regions such as *Isparta*, *Kula*, *Afyon*, and *Denizli*, where this tradition still continues.

**Key Words:** symbolism, weaving, carpet, kilim, Turkish art, motif, death

## **INTRODUCTION**

People all around the world have depicted their belief symbols on stone, soil, mine, ceramics and weavings for centuries. By the act of putting these beliefs into visual materials, objects that have been evaluated within the human–culture–civilization–art relation appeared.

Death is the last phase of the transition phases in human life such as birth, growth and marriage and it is a common art theme among many cultures. Turkish culture has a strong background of beliefs, customs, traditions and ethical principles that evolve around the death. This has been reflected to weavings such as *carpet*, *kilim*, *jejim*, *zili*, *soumak* as both motifs and design compositions that are formed by the gathering of motifs.

Carpets and kilims have been produced to meet the physical needs of human beings as well as psychological expectations, from the very beginning. Weavings not only showed the talent of the weaver, but also conveyed their messages regarding life, their beloved ones and events. Each motif of the carpets and kilims has been woven for thousands of years and has become the art of our ancestors. When unspoken emotions were to be expressed, motifs were gathered in different colors and techniques, and magnificent weavings came into existence. Even the colors had various symbolic meanings. Red has been the symbol of love while green, blue, black and yellow have symbolized desire, nobility, mourning and soil (thus fertility), respectively. Today, the carpets and kilims that are woven with different methods in different regions keep on being the language of Anatolia with color and motif differentiation from region to region (Gunyol 2001).

## **MOTIFS THAT SYMBOLIZE DEATH DIRECTLY**

In Anatolia, while death is feared and to be protected against, it is also greeted with great maturity and strength. For that reason, in the weavings of our different regions, death has been symbolized by different motifs symbolizing the pain that it gives, readiness to face it or the desire of keeping it away from the beloved ones.

### ***The Motif of Bird***

The most attractive motif which symbolizes death in weavings is the motif of “*bird*” (ERBEK 2002, 190). For example, the motif of “lover bird” which is used for Hakkari *kilims* and *soumaks* symbolizes fleetness that is the mortality of human beings. This motif symbolizes also happiness, gaiety and love but also the spirit of somebody died. Bird motif combined with women calls for longing and expectation of some news.

Together with might and power, it also represents death. It is seen in the stylized form in lüleper kilims (*Figure 1a, b-2a,b*) (Anonymous 2004).



*Figure 1a, b. Hakkari soumak with the motif of lover bird (Filiz Olmez -Special Collection)*



*Figure 2a,b. Lüleper kilim with stylized bird motif (Olcer 1988, 153)*

According to the Anatolian beliefs, on Turkish carpets and kilims, many different bird species were used to symbolize various meanings. The birds such as owl and black crow mean bad luck while doves, pigeons and nightingales symbolize good luck. In the later case, the figure of bird is the symbol of happiness, power and strength, delight and love.

The bird is the imperial symbol of various settlements in Anatolia. It is known that eagles and other predatory birds are the symbol of rulers and chieftains in *Gokturk* and *Uighur* epochs. There are some signs that these birds are their protecting souls or their legal symbols. For example, a white falcon is seen as the essence of chieftain soul. An eagle is also the essence of being a chieftain and the protecting soul in the head sculpture of *Kultigin* (Kazar 2003).

Birds also refer to divine messengers and a long life. The phoenix fighting against the dragon announces spring (Anonymous 2006a). According to a legend, the phoenix brought

the herb that gave soma, which was the elixir, to Anatolia. This bird which is a legend hero has red and golden plume and talks to the heaven. When nearing the end of its life, it sets its nest made from spring tree branches on fire and burns itself so a new phoenix comes into the world. By this legend, it symbolizes reincarnation and immortality.

In Sufism, the bird symbolizes the soul that is relieved from the body and the material heaviness of the world as it is not seen by eye (Arseven 2002).

In Shamanism, it is believed that when a man dies, his soul gets out of the body in the form of a bird and enters into another body. Likewise, in Buddhism the soul reincarnates in a different body when the original body dies. This is often used in the epics of the *Alevi* and *Bektashi dervishes*. For example; when *Ahmed Yesevi* sent *Hadji Bektash* to Anatolia, he came “in the pants of a pigeon”. The message given here is that *Horasan* saints are not warriors, they are pacifist people. They are the ones who address to the heart and soul of the people and so they come in the pants of a pigeon (Ocak 2001).

The bird motifs that reverberate to the weavings from the beliefs, legends and daily life forms are the main part of the design. For example, the main designs of the kilims of *Tekirdag-Sarkoy* in the *Istanbul Vakıflar Carpet and Kilim Museum* belonging to 19<sup>th</sup> century and the *kilims* of Giresun-Sebinkarahisar in the *Ankara Ethnography Museum* belonging to 18<sup>th</sup> century are constituted of various stylized bird motifs (*Figure 3a, b*). Likewise, the bird figure is one of the indispensable motifs of *Konya kilims*. “Crane convoy” used in *Eber kilims* of *Isparta* region may be given as an example (The Catalog Of Anatolian Kilims 1995, 197).



**Figure 3a, b.** Kilim of Tekirdag-Sarkoy and stylized bird motifs (The Catalog Of Anatolian Kilims 1995, 197)

Marby carpet is one of the oldest carpets on which a bird motif was used (Yetkin 1991, 20) (*Figure 3*). *Istanbul and Konya Museums* have many beautiful examples of “*Usak*

Carpets with Birds” which have been studied within the class of *Usak* carpets with white background (Aslanapa 2005, 187) (*Figure 4a, b*).



**Figure 4a, b.** *Usak Carpet with bird* (Aslanapa 2005, 187)

### ***The Motifs of Ram, Sheep and Horse***

Ram, sheep and horse are the symbols of death, as well as many other things in Turkish art and culture. Ram is also a symbol that offers protection from death. Motifs like sheep and head of ram are the ones that have been passed to carpets from gravestone ornaments (Deniz 2000, 190; Coruhlu 2002).

Sheep and horse motifs exist in Seljuk epoch carpets which were transferred to *Istanbul Vakıflar Carpet and Kilim Museum* from *Divrigi Ulu Mosque*. The motifs derived from ram and sheep are the main components of *Afyon-Emirdag*, *Konya*, *Kars*, *Malatya*, *Gaziantep* and *Balıkesir kilims*, *Hakkari soumaks*, *Sivas jejjims*, *Elazığ*, *Dosemealtı*, *Kars*, *Kutahya-Simav* carpets.

### ***The Motif of Knife***

Knife expresses the ritual of sacrifice, revenge and death. It also expresses cutting and putting an end, as the sword and khanjar (a traditional Ottoman dagger) do. This might mean getting rid of the bad habits that one has or reaching to the preferred ones. For this reason, as it is the symbol of death, it is also the symbol of martyrdom (Coruhlu 2002). The “khanjar leaf” motif used in Classic Ottoman epoch carpets and named after its resemblance to khanjar, the motifs of “bickirli water” (water with saw), “saw jag” and “ax edge” that are used as edge water are examples of this kind (Deniz 2000, 139).

### *The Motif of Cypress*

Another symbol of death is the motif of cypress and is transferred to weavings from gravestones. In addition, it can also symbolize beauty and eternity with its green color that never fades and with its charming smell. It is the stable motif of the life tree as a result of its long life and therefore symbolizes immortality. The cult of tree comes from the oldest epochs of humanity. In *Kirsehir*, *Kula* and *Gordes* carpets, one encounters the motif of *cypress tree* (Figure 5a, b-6a, b).



**Figure 5a, b.** Kirsehir carpet with motifs of cypress tree (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1995, 0540)



**Figure 6a, b.** Kula carpet with motifs of cypress tree (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1998, 0194)

The Kula carpets on which the motifs of cypress tree, rose and house are used together are known with the name of “carpet with cemetery” (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1998, 0194). Motif of *cypress tree* also can be seen in *Konya-Kecimuhsine* jejjims (Figure 7a, b) (Hull & Wyhowska 2000, 118).



*Figure 7a, b. Motif of cypress tree seen in Konya-Kecimuhsine jejims (Hull & Wyhowska 2000, 118)*

### ***The Motif of Chest***

This motif generally symbolizes the trousseau of a young girl. As the objects in the chest are designated to be used in the house of the husband, the expectations and hopes of a young girl are reflected in the pieces that she weaves knits and over which she embroiders. The laceworks, needle laces that she knits, the carpets, kilims that she weaves from the beginning of her childhood to bring to the house of the man (husband) are the symbol of her happy tomorrows. The motif of chest is stylized as rectangle and square on the carpets. However, the motif of chest symbolizes death on the weavings woven at *Canakkale*, *Yuntdagı*, *Kula*, and *Toros* mountains. It is also widely used on the kilims and carpets of *Malatya* region (Figure 8a, b) (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1995, 0598).



*Figure 8a, b. Malatya carpet with chest motif (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1995, 0598)*

### ***The Motifs of Poppy and Earring***

The motif of poppy symbolizes the magic power and eternal sleep (Anonymous 2006b). It was used in a carpet that was woven in the 18<sup>th</sup> century which is now in exhibition

in *Konya Museum* (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1998, 0151). The motif of earring, however, symbolizes death in the *Bardız kilims* (Kushan 1986, 20). A *Gaziantep* carpet which belongs to 19<sup>th</sup> century and has been exhibited in *Elazığ Museum* also has the motif of earring, symbolizing death (Figure 9a, b) (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1995, 0530).



**Figure 9a, b.** *Gaziantep* carpet with earring motif (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1995, 0530)

### ***The Motifs of Leaf***

Leaf is a motif that is related to both life and death. It is believed that a person dies with every falling leaf and a person is born with every new leaf. It also symbolizes the immortality of the spirit (Anonymous 2006b). Two examples are the leaf motifs at the broad borders of the *Konya* carpets belonging to 19<sup>th</sup> century which have been exhibited in *Antalya Museum* and the ones belonging to 18<sup>th</sup> century which have been exhibited in the *Museum of Turkish Islamic Arts*. In addition, the wide palm tree leaves at the starry *Usak* carpet's medallion belonging to 17<sup>th</sup> century which has been exhibited in the *Newyork Metropolitan Museum* is another example. Finally, the plane leaves used for the *Gaziantep* carpet's broad borders belonging to 18<sup>th</sup> century which has been exhibited in *Ankara Ethnography Museum* symbolize garden of heaven (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1998, 0199).

### ***The Motif of Deer***

The anthropologist and archaeologist researcher named *Ester Jacobson* states in his researches about Siberian nations that the deer symbolizes death and life in the *pre-Iskits* epoch (Ocak 2001). The deer motif used at the *Ladik* carpets symbolizes death. On the weavings, the deer motif has the characteristic of a guide.

### ***The Motifs of Centipede and Yel Egdi***

The centipede motif used at the *jejims* and the *yel egdi* motif used at the kilims woven in *Denizli Uzunpinar* region symbolize death and bad luck.



### ***The Motif of Ewer***

The motif of ewer represents the holy water that sanctifies human beings. Besides this, it also represents pregnancy, beginning of life and the basic element of life which is water. Ewer motifs are the ones that are used in *Mucur* and *Gordes* carpets (Figure 10a, b).



**Figure 10a, b.** *Gordes carpet with ewer motif* (Franses 2007, 176)

The ewer motifs that are given symmetry on both sides of the mihrab at the prayer rugs of *Mucur* belonging to 18<sup>th</sup> century is the most beautiful examples of this kind (Aslanapa 2005, 273-275). The ewer motif that is used in the carpets of *Isparta* that are woven and kept for burial and the ewer motifs that are used in *Isparta-Kuyucak* kilims symbolize death.

### **MOTIFS RELATED TO DEATH**

Main motifs developed in Turkish weavings concerning death are the ones that symbolize the facts of “life after death”, “immortality and eternity”, “reincarnation”, “heaven”, “protection against the malice that may cause to death”.

#### ***The Motifs of Charm, Amulet and Burr***

The evil eye is assumed as a fatal, devastating psychological power which is believed to exist in the eyes of people who are supernatural, damaging, and destroying. They particularly give harm to children, bring illness, disability or at least make people unhappy, and are therefore the enemy of happiness. It is believed that some men have a power in their glances, and those glances provoke or unlock, injury, malice and even death (Ornek 2000, 132). “Charm” on the other hand is believed to be a talisman that is believed to have a magical and religious power to protect the owner from dangerous external factors. To be protected from evil, different types of charms are used, and are generally carried on the shoulder, neck, inside and outside the house and cradle (Erbek 2002, 190). The motifs of

charms and amulets are seen as an eye, generally on the carpets, by embroidering a white point inside the blue or in the form of a triangle. At the carpets of Turcoman and Yuruks, there is a protecting characteristic made for the desire of protecting the weaver and user against the evil eye. The motifs of charms and amulets are often seen in the kilims of *Balikesir-Yuncu*, in the jejims of *Kutahya, Mersin, Afyon-Emirdag*, and in the carpets of *Van* and *Kars*.

Burr is a cotton-like plant that sticks on the clothes of people and on the hairs of animals. The Anatolian people, who believe that the thorns over burr banish the evil eye, used it as a motif of amulet. On the other hand, the idiom of “like Burr”, which also means “full of flowers”, caused it to be used on the flour bags as a symbol of abundance. The motif of burr can be seen frequently in *Mersin-Yuruk* jejims and zilis, *Mugla, Bodrum, Adana, Karatepe* kilims and *Kutahya, Konya*, and *Tokat* carpets (Erbek 2002, 190).

#### ***The Motifs of Hook and Cross***

The crosses and various hook types are frequently used in Turkish carpets to protect people. The motif of the hook has been used both to overcome the effect of the evil eye and as a bridge between the concepts of female and male. It symbolizes the actions that gather opposite and different concepts, such as female-male, mountain-valley, sea-wave, and death-life. They are the motifs which are frequently used at *Nigde-Bor* zilis, *Afyon-Alanyurt* jejims, *Konya, Malatya, Bingol, Kars* kilims, *Konya-Beysehir, Elazığ, Kars, Kırsehir-Mucur* carpets and *Kars* soumaks (Erbek 2002, 191). The motif of cross is constituted by the interception of two lines; one is horizontal, the other one is vertical. Because of the shape of the cross that shows four different ways, it is believed that it divides the evil eye into four pieces and throws them into four different places. This is a commonly used symbol in Anatolia and has been depicted in *Milas, Usak, Dosemealti, Kars* and *Kutahya* carpets as well as *Sivas, Eskisehir, Konya* kilims.

#### ***The Motif of Eye***

The eye that is the organ of visual perception is used for the symbol of intellectual perception as well. The motifs of eye come out from the belief that the human eye is the best protector against the evil eye. This is the most certain measure against the eye which is the committer of the harmful and fatal glances called as the evil eye and it is symbolized by the point of eye put at the middle of holy blue color. The motif of eye varies according to the region but generally is embroidered in a geometrical way. The eye is indicated by a triangle,

rectangle, square, rhombus or a rhombus that is divided into four by a cross, sometimes by a point that is embroidered below a pointed eyebrow and sometimes inside of a square.

The motif of eye is a motif that is used in *Afyon* soumaks and *Konya, Eskisehir, Balıkesir-Yuncu, Cankırı, Aydın* kilims, *Antalya-Dosemealtı* carpets.

#### ***The Motifs of Hand, Finger, Comb and the Number of Five***

The number five that expresses the fingers of a hand is a precaution against the evil eye. They are seen in different shapes in the carpets such as five borders, a hand with five fingers or as five points. The motifs of hand, finger and a comb containing five points represent that the fingers protect (the weaver or the user) from the evil eye. The motif of hand gathers fruitfulness and good luck. At the same time, this motif has a holy meaning as it symbolizes the hand of the sister of the Prophet Muhammad. The motif of comb is generally used in relation with marriage and birth. This motif signifies protecting the will of marriage and birth against the evil eye. They are the motifs that are used at plane weavings such as kilims, jejims of many regions and carpets of *Kars* and *Erzincan*.

#### ***The Motifs of Water Route, Water of Life and Glass***

*The water route* emphasizes the importance of water in human life. In Anatolia, water is the life itself. Water, what Anatolia woman is to another, has also become a motif in their weavings. The water of life or *ab-ı hayat*, which is what it is called in the Anatolia folk tales, is a magical elixir that renders human being immortal, turns the elders to young people and makes them powerful and turns ugly girls into “Miss Worlds”. “Water route” is used as borders in carpets which are also called “water”, or at nacres. Water which is assumed to be an indispensable source of life is holy and the motifs of water and glass represent immortality. They are the motifs used at the weavings of kilims, jejims and zilis in many regions of Anatolia and carpets of *Kars, Gaziantep* and *Yagcıbedir*.

#### ***The Motif of Scorpion***

Scorpion is an animal that can be met almost at any region that is mountainous, dry or humid and against which Anatolian people need to protect themselves. The motif of scorpion represents the soul of devil symbolically. According to a fable, the scorpion says: “*I am neither a natural soul, nor devil. I am a creature that brings death to anyone who touches me. I have two corns and a tail that I toss about to right and left. The names of my corns are cruelty and hatred and my tail is a hook. I give birth only once. Fecundity, which is the symbol of fruitfulness, is the sign of death for me.*”

The scorpion waits with its tail which is always apparent and one end with a marsupium full of poison that is ready to inject death to the one who touches it. Therefore, it is the symbol of bad intentions and causeless fight.

South Eastern Anatolia can have a very hot and dry climate and scorpions and similar animals exist there abundantly. Thus, deaths occur frequently because of being poisoned. Anatolian people have been using the motif of scorpion on their weavings as a way to be protected against the scorpion that can give harm to them. These motifs are frequently used at the background or as outer border ornaments. Additionally, kilim has a surface that scorpion can hardly walk over because of its knotty texture. This way the weaving is believed to offer double protection as it prevents the scorpion to reach the owner (Erbek 2002, 191).

An Avshar woman whose five children died consecutively expresses her pain by putting five *mihrab* motifs with the head of scorpion at the *mihrab* parts of the prayer kilims (Durul 1983, 75-79). The motif of scorpion is the characteristic motif of *Dosemealti* carpets as well.

### ***The Motif of Life Tree***

The motif of life tree symbolizes continuous development and change in the large meaning of life in shamanism (OCAK 2001). It gathers the three elements of the universe, underground via its roots that go under the soil, earth via its lower branches and body, heaven via its upper branches that rise up to the sky. It provides the communication between earth and heaven. Life tree is also characterized as “tree of soul” at Anatolian motifs. It is widely used on the gravestones in Anatolia. In the 17th century examples of Ladik carpets, *mihrab* was decorated with the motifs of life tree (*Figure 11a, b*) (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1995, 0563).



**Figure 11a, b.** Ladik carpet decorated with the motifs of life tree (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1995, 0563)

This motif is the sign of searching immortality and the hope of the existence of life after death. The birds that are seen in the weavings of many regions are the life birds that are going to fly when their time comes. Soul is synonymous with spirit. It is also the symbol of immortality in the carpets of *Hakkari* (Anonymous 2004). When the motifs of *bird*, *dragon* and *life tree* are used together in the carpets of some regions like *Gaziantep*, they express the continuity of soul and immortality.

#### ***The Motifs of Wolf Trace and Wolf Mouth***

They are the motifs that are woven by nomads by the aim of protection from the predators they meet in the nature. People use this motif to be protected from wolfs and wild animals. During the prehistoric times, people believed that making figures of wild animals or imitating them was necessary to be protected against them. This motif which exists in the weavings of many regions is more often used in the carpets of *Mersin-Mut* region.

#### ***The Motif of Ram Horn***

The motif of ram horn is the symbol of power, strength, health and happiness, sustenance and protection of male fertility. The weavings that are decorated only by ram horns are symbolizing the world of men rather than women. The spiral view of ram horn from profile symbolizes the route that soul draws while going to eternity. Moreover, as this motif also symbolizes the sacrificial animals, by weaving them in the carpets it is hoped that the merit will be ever lasting (Erbek 2002, 191).

#### ***The Motifs of Stars and Lotus (Stars with 5, 6, 8, 12 Corners)***

The *six cornered star* which expresses the secrets concerning human also symbolizes the secrets concerning universe. The *twelve cornered star* has symbolized Venus on the ornaments and even on the coins of Seljuks-Ottomans. *Venus* is the symbol of goodness and renewed life. The *eight cornered star* on the other hand symbolizes the life line that goes from birth till death. “The flower of lotus” is a symbol life and death, one within the other (Coruhlu 1989:157-168). The motif of *eight cornered star* gave its name to “*Usak* carpets with stars” (Yetkin 1991, 93).

#### ***The Motif of Fortune’s Wheel***

Different meanings have been given to some very old motifs in different times. The motif of fortune’s wheel is one of these motifs and its origin goes to the centuries B.C. As it symbolized four gods of wind at one time, it has symbolized eternity, rotating world, revolving fate, the wheels of destiny and recently love as well. They are used in kilims of

different regions and in the carpets of *Bergama* (Figure 12a, b) (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1998, 0118).



*Figure 12a, b. 18<sup>th</sup> century Bergama carpet with motif of fortune's wheel (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1998, 0118)*

### ***The Motifs of Flint and Arrow***

The motif of flint is a motif that is woven to protect the house, family and the beloved ones against the malices like death and separation that prevents happiness (Anonymous 2006b) The “motif of flint” has been used as a symbol of protection in the carpets of *Konya-Karapınar* belonging to 18<sup>th</sup> century and carpets of *Konya* belonging to 19<sup>th</sup> century (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1998, 0145). The motif of arrow is the symbol of bravery and fearlessness, challenging dangers and death. The women who weave this design to their carpets try to express that their husbands are powerful. The motif of arrow is the characteristic symbol of *Yuntđagi* weavings.

### ***The Motif of Serpent***

According to the myths, the serpent who is the symbol of reincarnation, immortality and eternity as it molts every year is also an animal that taught human beings many useful herbs and plants but at the same time prevented human beings from finding and eating the herb of immortality. The serpent that is the symbol of health is also the indispensable incumbent caretaker of the life tree. It indicates reincarnation and eternity. The motif of the serpent is the characteristic motif of *Taskale* carpets. Additionally, it was put at one corner of the large border of *Milas* carpets belonging to 19<sup>th</sup> century that depicts the theme of heaven (The Catalog Of Turkish Carpets 1998, 0132). The motif of serpent was used at the borders of *Konya* kilims belonging to 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the kilims of *Hatay-Reyhanli* and *Icel-Mut* (The Catalog Of Anatolian Kilims 1995, 170).

### ***The Motifs of Mosque and Turbeh***

These motifs are the ones that are seen at the borders of *Yahyali* carpets and that symbolize the weavers' love of God, and her wish of goodness and health from God and her wish of heaven at her eternal voyage that is after death (*Figure 13a,b, c, d*). *Turbah* motifs are also seen in Gordes carpets as basic motif with several tree motifs (*Figure 14a, b*).



***Figure 13a, b, c, d. Turbeh motifs seen in Yahyali carpets (Olmez 1999)***



***Figure 14a, b. Turbeh motifs seen in Gordes carpets (Stone 2004, 66)***

### ***The Motif of Turtle***

Turtle was used at the lower parts of the columns on the *Tonyukuk* monuments, and it is a motif that comes from Shaman traditions and used against the evil eye in our ethnography (Diyarbakirli 1972, 55). The turtle indicates long life and death (Coruhlu 1993, 15).

The motif of turtle which is also known as “tortoise” is presented in a geometrical form which looks like the motif of *elibelinde*. The motif of turtle is used in the kilims of *Kula*, *Manisa-Selendi*, and *Kutahya* region kilims and *Karakecili* kilims (Onuk&Akpınarlı 1995, 20; Deniz 2000, 196).

### *The Motifs of Dragon (Grifon)*

The practice of using the dragon motif in the Anatolian weavings comes from ancient times. The motif of dragon has been used as the symbol of immortality, watchman, protection and cure in the culture of Eastern Turkistan, Central Asia, Sumer, Hittite, Frig, Urartu, Helen, Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Islam, Seljuks and Ottoman. The dragon (*grifon*) that is believed to be present anywhere, can survive in any climate and region. It is the holy and the imaginary animal of the sea, sky, mountain and the forest. It is also a symbol of power, strength and might as a result of its supernatural appearance and its ability of scattering flames from its mouth (multiheaded, multilegged, multitailed). The dragon is a mythological animal that has legs resembling the lion's, a tail resembling the serpent's, and powerful wings. The dragon is the master of air and water. It is believed that the fly of dragon and phoenix brings fruitful spring rains. The dragon that is believed to be a huge serpent is the protector of magical objects such as treasures and life tree. The dragon is a popular animal in Turkish culture and civilizations. It was first mentioned in the Gilgames Epics which is one of the Sumerian legends after its eating the herb of immortality. *Asklepios* was also appeared as the double-headed serpent and it distributed cure. It appeared at caravanserais and fountains, it is the symbol of eternal life, eternity and happiness. The stick of Prophet Moses took the shape of dragon and showed the miracle of God to people and people are demanded to learn from their mistakes. The serpent who ate the herb of life took place at the myths and symbols because of its eternal life poison and as a cure against chronic diseases, as a result of being exaggerated by the imagination of people (Bayram 1996).

The most important ones of the carpets with the motif of dragon are the numerous Seljukian epoch carpets that are sent to *Istanbul Vakıflar Carpet and Kilim Museum*. The *Usak* carpets with Dragon appeared in the XVII. century (Yetkin 1991, 21).

The inside part of the "chest" part, which is called as such, of the carpets of *Kırşehir* carpets are decorated by the motifs of "double-headed dragon" that lies down as a "lying S". Moreover; the motifs of dragon are seen at the kilims of *Kayseri, Erzurum, Kahramanmaraş, Malatya, Sivas, Balıkesir, Manisa* (Figures 15a, b).





Figure 15a, b. Manisa kilim with motif of dragon (Valcarengi 1994, 95)

## CONCLUSION

The symbolical meanings and contents of the motifs that are used in Anatolian weavings support and complement each other. There is perfect coherence and integrity between them. The symbolical narration of motifs has reached our time over many centuries without losing the deep meanings in their content. As this type of humane concepts and symbols gain importance, the weavings of carpet and kilims preserve their traditional continuity.

The fact of death has also taken its place symbolically within the motifs used in the weavings. The motifs of *bird, ram, sheep, horse, knife, cypress, chest, poppy, leaf, earring, deer, ewer, centipede, yel egdi* that have different symbolical meanings are put in the weavings of some regions especially to symbolize death. These motifs come together in carpets, kilims, jejims, zilis and soumaks with other different motifs and show themselves in the design compositions which have various tales.

Additionally, there are motifs symbolizing the concepts related to death such as “life after death”, “immortality”, “reincarnation”, “heaven”, and “protection from the malicious actions that might end with death”. Some of these motifs are the motifs of *charm and amulet, burr, hook and the cross, dragon, eagle, eye, hand, finger, comb, bandeau, water route, scorpion, tree of life, trace of wolf, horn of a ram, mosque, turbeh, flint, arrow, fortune’s wheel*. They also have a deep-seated past as they nestle different meanings and symbols together and are the motifs which decorate most of the Turkish weavings. For example, the composition of bird, dragon, star and the tree of life motifs stands for continuity of the soul and immortality in West Anatolia carpets. Birds on the tree of life symbolize life and soul.

Dragon is the animal guarding the tree of life. The star is used to indicate the eternity of the tree of life

The irrevocable fact of nature, that death, attracts attention by rebounding as a starting, not as an end, to the weavings. The motifs and designs that symbolize death will last as long as the Anatolian and Turkish people exist.

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