

The Ecological Approach to Understanding the Nature of the Amazigh Symbol of the rug from the Khenchela Region

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Abstract:

This article's content discusses the influence of the environment on the emergence of symbols placed on cultural products, especially traditional crafts. These symbols carry meanings and connotations, belonging to an art form that expresses and achieves social, cultural, and religious dimensions. Furthermore, these symbols are distinguished by a specific style in their production process, accompanied by a series of symbolic rituals during their creation. If art is a human characteristic, explaining its presence across diverse cultural groups worldwide, then Amazigh art exhibits other distinguishing features. Its surrounding environment plays a crucial role in highlighting its feelings towards it. Ultimately, this article aims to emphasise the meaning and essence of the most significant symbols on certain art pieces, the colours employed, the extent of the environment's influence on the emergence of Amazigh art, and the dimension it achieves by revealing topics related to daily social life.

Keywords: Amazigh, art, ecology, embodiment, meaning, symbol

1. Introduction

Scientific studies and research in the social and human sciences, based on their theoretical foundations, aim to raise issues related to human life and attempt to understand both its material and immaterial intellectual outputs by developing theoretical frameworks to

investigate a specific topic. The goal of the research process is to arrive at answers to questions, starting from uncovering the role that human activity leaves as a global cultural legacy. It is clear that cultural products are characterized by a set of features and attributes that carry human dimensions within the comprehensive concept of culture, which achieves harmony between human life and its surrounding environment, capable of activating the process of communication and expression within an integrated system of knowledge where individuals share their common feelings, The continuation of this human production, which arose under certain conditions, must have been influenced by key factors that contributed to the development of symbolic art methods.

One of the most important of these factors is the environment, due to its direct impact on shaping its character and cultural appearance in general. The development of various methods of expression and communication by humans has created the ability to convey their feelings from sensory levels to a level of artistic formation that blends the purpose of utility with the fulfillment of their psychological desires and expressing them as products with messages and meanings that require further decoding and uncovering their contents and implications.

The continuous interaction of humans with their environment generates a torrent of complex emotions: fear of the unknown, sorrow for loss, and hope for tomorrow. According to psychology, these emotions are not merely isolated internal states, but rather deep and interconnected responses to external and internal stimuli. This immense quantity of emotions drives humans to attempt to understand nature, leading them to symbolism as a means to achieve that. The person translates their feelings and emotional experiences from an intangible sensory level to a tangible one, such as artworks or forms with symbolic meanings and connotations, thereby transforming their abstract emotions into material or visible entities that can be contemplated and interpreted. This creative process not only helps him process what he feels, but also allows him to connect with others,

share his experiences, and leave a mark that expresses his existence and interaction with his inner and outer world.

Humans translate their emotional feelings and intangible emotional experiences into a material level, such as artworks or forms with symbolic meanings and implications. Thus, their abstract feelings transform into tangible or visible entities that can be contemplated and interpreted. This creative process not only helps them process what they feel but also enables them to communicate with others, share their experiences, and leave a mark that reflects their existence and interaction with their internal and external worlds. From this perspective, the relationship between the environment and symbolism, and the approach to this topic, allows us to pose the following question:

-To what extent has the environment influenced the formation of symbols on traditional products in the Khenchela region?

1.1. Sub-questions:

In order to cover the aspects of the issue, we decided to formulate the sub-questions as follows :

- What is meant by ecology, and what is the concept of a symbol?
- What are the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that the methodology uses to understand the nature and function of symbols?

1.2. Importance of the study:

The topic opens a field of knowledge in the process of documenting symbols as a cultural heritage for the local community, enhancing traditional industries and crafts by highlighting the historical depth that the symbol carries.

1.3. Objectives: To obtain interpretations and meanings of symbols from within the community itself and to understand the living aspect of symbolic heritage and how it continues or evolves.

This study adopts an ecological semiotic approach to analyze the nature of the symbol in Amazigh art through a purposive sample targeting a set of distinctive symbols. These symbols vary to include environmental symbols directly inspired by the surrounding nature, religious symbols that reflect spiritual beliefs, natural symbols with cosmic connotations, and astronomical symbols such as celestial bodies like stars. The analysis aims to reveal how the environment influences the creation of symbols and to highlight the pivotal role of the artist's interaction with their environment in shaping these symbols and their meanings, In order to answer the problem.

1.4. Methodological Procedures for the Study:

- This study relied on the following methodological procedures: The anthropological approach: with a comprehensive view of the ethnographic and ethnological anthropological approach using participant observation tools.
- Interview guide, in interpreting the symbols on the Lamamsha carpet. And the colors that are used as symbolic indicators in the Khenchela region.
- The interview guide covers three main topics: the first topic addresses the general concepts of ecology and symbolic anthropology, the second topic discusses environmental symbols in the carpet (Khenchela rug) and colors inspired by nature. In order to

2. The First Axis in Defining Concepts:

2.1. Ecology:

Literally: the science of the relationship of animals to their environment (Meanings, 2025). According to Jamila Saliba definition, it is "the home and the state, and in terminology, it refers to the

collection of things and phenomena that surround the individual and affect them." The environment in this context refers to time and place, as they are the frameworks that surround natural phenomena". (gamila, 1982, p. 211)

As for the concept of the environment according to the Lalande Encyclopedia, it means (surrounding, social environment, intellectual milieu) This is the text of the article (Lalande, 2001, p. 806)

But if this concept is linked to a specific field, its perception must be defined within the theoretical context of the sciences. Dictionaries and lexicons agree that the term "environment" is synonymous with ecology. Ecology, or the science of ecology, is the study that specializes in the relationship between plants, animals, and humans, their relationships with each other, and their relationship with the environment in which they exist. (soulayman, 2009, p. 08)

Terminologically: The term is derived from the Greek origin "oikos," which means what surrounds something and becomes its living place. As for "logia," it means science, study, logic, or law. Thus, it is the study of the interactions between living organisms and their environment, "the science of habitat" or "the science of conditions of life." Ecology is defined as the science that studies the reciprocal relationship between living organisms and their environment (HD, 1981, p. 1)

3.1 The Environment as a Determinant of Symbolic formation:

A- Symbolism: The concept of the symbol varies among thinkers and philosophers, which is attributed to the long-standing use of the word "symbol" itself in various fields, The symbol, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, has taken on its clear functional meanings and scientific presence in various sciences and arts at the beginning of the twentieth century, coinciding with the emergence of the humanities in the field of psychology with Freud, Jung, and Lacan. Look at picture number 1.

In the field of linguistics with Saussure and Jakobson, and then with most linguists and etymologists, in history by Begbie and in the history of religions by Dumézil, in anthropology by Lévi-Strauss, and in sociology in the works of Barthes and Lefebvre, despite the importance of using the concept of the symbol with its threefold branches and its wide application in various scientific fields, the contemporary human scientific movement today witnesses the emergence of intellectual currents and critical trends that reject the classical formulations of the concept of the symbol. This critical current is still in the process of formation and has not yet reached its full development to take on a scientific form capable of presence in the conceptual field. (France, Encyclopædia Universalis, 2025)

Fig 1. The Symbol of the Lion's Paw

(Source: Bouzidi Fouad (2023), PhD Thesis, Appendices.)

Charles Chadwick says that through analyzing the works of symbolist poets, we can reach a great deal of knowledge about the symbol as something that evokes multiple meanings when we connect it to the artwork, enriching its aspects and adding new dimensions that release it into the realms of infinity. We find that the artwork does not refer to the thing directly, but rather indirectly, through a third medium that might be called the symbol.

And Cassirer found other scholars who revealed this symbolic function of language, and then it occurred to him that the term "symbol" might apply to all human activities and that it is not limited to the field of science. Rather, it is correct to expand the science of knowledge so that it extends from the sciences to other areas (Cassirer, 1961, p. 55)

The artist was influenced by the cultural-religious environment:

The cultural environment, including religious beliefs (such as Islam and its influences), spiritual heritage, and popular legends, has affected the artist and craftsmen. Despite the age of this craft, it has

clearly adapted to ancient religious periods. Islam, for instance, is suited to creating prayer rugs without exaggerating the use of symbols, relying instead on symmetrical geometric shapes that impart an aesthetic spirit. The repeated geometric patterns reflect a spirit of tolerance and the craftsman's commitment to expressing the religious dimension.

-Connection to origin: These symbols originated from the Amazigh person's need to express their relationship with the metaphysical, and to affirm their spiritual identity, using the shapes available in their cultural environment to imbue them with religious significance.

Semiotics of the four colors.

- The significance The color red (Azouqagh):

It is no coincidence that the Lamamcha throne is called the Red Throne, or that the region of Tazougah is derived from the name Azouqagh (red), which is the area where the Lamamcha throne is centered. This derivation of the name indicates strength, bravery, and a large number of individuals belonging to this throne. Additionally, the use of the color red predominates in the carpets, with shades ranging from light red to dark red, symbolizing the fertile red land.

But the research into the use of this color in other rituals and customs and its connection with its application in carpet making shows that "two skulls dating back to the Neolithic period (the Stone Age) were found near Oran, Tebessa, and the Aurba cave dating back to the same period." (Faidherbe, 1867, p. 312)

The significance of the color blue: (Azizaw):

The color blue is sometimes used in the Khenchela region to exemplify and describe a brave, noble, clever, and strong man, saying: "This is a blue man - Arqaz Azizaou," to indicate the strength of the blue color present in the community's mind. According to Ms. Noura Salmi, president of the Association of Authenticity and Creativity in Babar, Khenchela, she stated that the color does not need to be used excessively in carpets and rugs because it is present in the blue of the sky, which occupies a large area and has a dominant visual effect on

the space where individuals live. The rugs will not be the same color to avoid becoming pieces overwhelmed by blue, losing their beauty. (noura, 2024)

The significance of The color yellow (Oragh):

-The color yellow is one of the most beloved colors, and its presence in carpets is associated with some elements of nature such as sunlight and gold. It is rarely used in abundance in carpets, as the color represents everything precious and valuable. It reflects the weaver's vision in balancing the use of colors in carpets in accordance with their value and proportions in nature.

The significance of the color black (Aghqal or Abrakan):

Considering that the colors of the spectrum are seven and do not include white and black as colors, the region of Lmamcha has produced carpets of various known types in different parts of the world. It is noteworthy that no carpets, mats, or rugs dominated by the color black have been recorded. Its nature and strong presence are highlighted through the white spaces interspersed with black wool, revealing the details of the subject to be depicted. Some opinions consider black to be an omen of misfortune in carpets, and its use is ordinary and does not carry any significance.

The significance of the color White: (amlal):

The white dye is not extracted from any material since the wool is originally white, and it is sufficient to wash it and remove impurities by washing it with white soapstone. It is also not filtered or wrung out, making the wool more vibrant and pristine for as long as possible. And white, assuming it symbolizes purity and clarity in many civilizations in terms of belief, is good to be, from an artistic perspective, a background for a subject in the carpet adorned with black wool.

The (Tisdia) loom as a female-specific environment:

Many important family-related topics are present during the preparation and adjustment of the weft (Azta). The predominant topics are those related to family life and the personal life of women. Such topics require women, through their responsibilities, to arrange the future of their family members. Central topics include choosing a wife for sons, discussing dowries, and other family-related matters. (khadidja, 2024)

In societies that value weaving, women often serve as the custodians and transmitters of this knowledge and skill from generation to generation. This distinguished economic and cultural role grants her symbolic and social authority within the family and society. The ability to produce carpets, which are semicultural texts, places her in a position to control other aspects of family and social life, including arranging marriages that ensure the continuity of lineage and the transmission of heritage (Weiner, .(1987), p. 409)

Visions of public institutions:

During the events of the carpet exhibition at the Babaar Youth House, or the insights of institutions and experts: Analyzing interviews and media sources forms the official and expert perspectives, providing a qualitative addition to understanding the reality and prospects of the traditional carpet industry. In this regard, several interviews were conducted:

Directorate of Tourism and Traditional Industries in Khenchela

Interview with Mr. Hadari Ridwan, Inspector in the Traditional Industries and Crafts Department at the Directorate of Tourism and Traditional Industries in Khenchela, on February 20, 2023, at 3:00 PM. During this interview, Mr. Hadari emphasized the great importance that the state attaches to the traditional industries sector, especially regarding the preservation of carpet trademarks. He pointed out that the product is subject to a set of precise laws and standards in

the field of manufacturing, which aim to preserve the style, shape, symbols, and natural materials to ensure quality, in accordance with the laws and legislative regulations governing this vital sector. Mr. Hadari also explained the mechanisms of periodic monitoring, which include attending carpet festivals (such as the first and second editions) and exhibitions held at the Cultural Center and Youth House in Khenchela. In the course of his speech, he pointed out the inspection stops and examination operations that take place on various occasions, which include monitoring the recorded violations of products not adhering to the specifications set by the relevant authority, particularly concerning the Lmamsha carpets in the Khenchela region, in terms of the quality and authenticity of the raw materials as well. (hadhri, 2023)

Regional Radio Khenchla:

In the context of documenting the reality and prospects of this industry, a radio program was broadcast on the local airwaves in Khenchela on February 20, 2024, at 11:00 AM. A distinguished group of specialists and officials participated in this session, titled "The Carpet," including a representative from the National Institute for the Protection of Industrial Property (INAPI), the head of the Traditional Industries and Crafts Chamber in Khenchela, representatives from the Directorate of Culture and the Regional Museum in Khenchela, as well as a representative from the Babar Youth House. The discussion focused on the reality of carpets in the Khenchela region, the prospects and future of this industry, and the challenges facing the advancement of this sector. The discussants also addressed the difficulties and obstacles faced by artisans and craftsmen in ensuring the future of this craft. The participants highlighted the importance of intellectual property protection for traditional products, the role of institutions in supporting and encouraging artisans, and the necessity of creating effective marketing mechanisms to ensure the continuity of the Lmamshia carpet as an integral part of the region's cultural heritage.

Insights from the Employment Office in Khenchela:

on the role of social entrepreneurship in promoting the carpet-making craft In the context of monitoring the efforts of official institutions in supporting and developing the traditional industries sector, an official interview was dedicated to Mr. Hamidi Ahmed, head of the local employment office in Khenchela and an accredited trainer with the International Labour Organization of the United Nations in social entrepreneurship. This interview took place on 17/05/2024, where we were provided with all the facilities to inquire about the reality of artisans in the city of Khenchela, specifically those practicing the craft of carpet weaving.

Mr. Hamidi's answers were direct and focused, as he confirmed that the state's efforts are aimed at creating job opportunities and providing training courses for the owners of emerging enterprises in this sector. These courses aim to guide artisans towards effective marketing operations and production directed at the tourism sector, in addition to promoting and supporting rural girls in this field. (ahmed, 2024)

The National Public Museum of Antiquities khenchela:

In an interview with Mr. Bouzidi Haroun, Heritage Conservator and Head of the Conservation, Inventory, and Restoration Department at the National Public Museum of Bouaziz (for Antiquities) in Khenchela, a highly significant perspective was shared regarding the meanings of some common symbols. The silver buckle: a living testament to the continuity of the symbol.

This concept is reinforced by an important observation regarding the silver buckle (TaPzimit) that the elderly women wear as ornaments to fasten the traditional "Tabkhenouqth" dress. This buckle, which often bears traditional engravings and symbols, resembles in some of its forms the tattoos that elderly women place on their bodies. This similarity between tattoos on the body and engravings on jewelry, and the presence of these symbols on ancient funerary monuments, provides conclusive evidence that there is a cultural continuity of the

symbol from the pagan era, when these symbols were used for protection, bringing fertility, or affirming identity, which has been transmitted and rooted in arts and crafts today.

When many questions were raised regarding the symbols, especially the "Tanith" symbol which may refer to femininity or fertility, Mr. Bouzidi Faris confirmed that the pottery pieces found in the region, dating back to 300 BC, are rich in many Amazigh symbols. Interestingly, as the heritage curator pointed out, these ancient symbols closely resemble those used in modern pottery. This is the text of the article.

Field visits to museums and exhibitions

The National Public Museum of Cirta as part of deepening our understanding of the roots of Amazigh symbols and their historical significance, we conducted a field visit to the Cirta Museum in Constantine on March 18, 2024. Our visit focused on the wing dedicated to the pagan period, where strong visual evidence was found confirming the symbolic continuity of this civilization to this day. What caught our attention the most was a collection of ancient funerary monuments that commemorate the gods worshipped in North Africa. These monuments, according to the museum guide and some historical references, provide tangible evidence of symbols with deep and inherited meanings.

The Symbol in the Oral Heritage of Khanchla: Insights from Professor Onissi Mohamed Saleh, We met on May 5, 2025, with Professor Onissi Mohamed Salah, a distinguished researcher in the field of oral heritage of the region, an expert in the Amazigh language, and the author of numerous works on oral heritage. He also created an Amazigh-Arabic-French dictionary. Symbols form a profound cultural language that expresses the experiences and beliefs of communities throughout the ages. To understand the dimensions of meaning that the symbol carries in the Khenchela region. In conclusion, Professor

Onisi Mohamed Saleh summarized the urgent need for significant efforts in the documentation process.

The vision of the Association of Authenticity and Creativity for the municipality of Babar, Khenchela Province.

Professor Samlmi noura strives to document the signs and symbols on the Babar carpet through academic works. This point constitutes the essence of scientific research in the field of heritage. Documenting the symbols is not just a formal recording; it is an analytical process aimed at understanding the meanings of these symbols and their cultural and social functions. This academic documentation will contribute to:

-Intellectual property protection: to ensure that these symbols are not exploited without acknowledging their cultural creator.
Enhancing identity: by deepening the local community's understanding of these symbols that are part of its identity.
Reference for researchers: To provide a knowledge database for those studying and interested in Amazigh art and folk heritage.
Raising awareness: Educating the public about the value of these symbols and the stories and history they carry.

-Researcher's note: Interactions with Professor Samia at the literary café in Khanshala Cultural Center, the carpet exhibition at the youth center in Babar, and the traditional crafts exhibition on April 4, 2024, which included 12 local and national associations specialized in the production of Babar carpets. In addition to obtaining a copy of her work titled "Guide to Babar Carpets."

4. Discussion and Analysis of the Findings:

The ecological approach significantly contributes to understanding aspects of human phenomena, and the semiotics of symbols cannot be understood outside the cultural or environmental context. As Clifford Geertz says, "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun." The symbol is the translation of human sensory

feelings into symbols whose meanings are easily accessible and understood as a cultural product.

Through field observation and interviews with cultural associations and insights from public institutions, the axis concerning the existence of specific references documenting the meanings of symbols is a clear indicator of the absence of cognitive sedimentation and the rarity of documentation. This makes the challenges of researching the symbol, despite the symbolic richness carried by the Lmamsha carpet, face a fundamental challenge in the explicit awareness of contemporary local populations. It is observed that weavers and practitioners of rituals may use these symbols or perform the rituals associated with them, aware of their direct functional meanings—such as bringing fertility or providing protection—yet they may lack full awareness of the historical or ancient mythical roots of these symbols, such as the possible connection to the goddess Tanit or other ancient beliefs. This lack of explicit awareness can be explained within the framework of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, where he states: Symbols and rituals become part of the acquired 'habitus,' which directs actions without the necessity of full awareness of their deep historical roots. "Habitus is a system of durable and transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structured structures, that is, as principles that generate and organize practices and perceptions that can adapt objectively to their outcomes without assuming the existence of a conscious goal or explicit mastery of the necessary processes to achieve it." (p.bourdieu, 1977, p. 78)

Conclusion:

Revealing the goals and purposes behind certain human practices is what studies and research aim to achieve by raising issues about human phenomena and the underlying dimensions of their existence. There is a need for scrutiny and investigation to reach rational interpretations based on scientific foundations. This is behind the emergence of many fields of knowledge and the establishment of sciences, such as anthropology, which focuses on delving into the depths of every human activity and exploring the role or function

played by their cultural practices to understand them in their correct context and relative to the environment in which these phenomena were produced and formed.

And as in the rest of the Berber ornamentation, the most common tattoos are very simple geometric shapes, such as dots, circles, formations with straight lines, crosses, sharp angles, triangles, diamonds, and combs. Some of these designs may have originally been borrowed from the plant or animal world. However, even the women who apply these designs mechanically and in various ways know nothing about them, due to the deep distortion and alteration they have undergone.

- Revealing the significance of the symbol, embedding it, and indexing it so that its meaning remains clear and does not require interpretation, while working on classifying it due to its social, cultural, psychological dimensions, and the quality and authenticity of carpet topics through their symbols, falls within the repeated calls for its classification under the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection Convention adopted in 1972.

- The symbol represents a vast field of knowledge related to the culture of society, which can highlight the historical identity of the community and protect it from extinction.

Reviving the meanings of the symbols carried by cultural products, which achieve true significance from a communicative and social perspective, and their connection to national identity.

Promoting the culture of introducing local and national products through the responsible authorities: the Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Industries, the Ministry of Culture, the media, and universities through academic works that accompany these activities to frame and highlight the state's efforts to advance the traditional industries sector.

This knowledge gap highlights the utmost importance of anthropological and historical research. The researcher's task lies in reconstructing the 'missing link' of knowledge by uncovering these hidden connections, documenting them, and analyzing them. This effort aims to restore awareness of the authenticity of these symbols and their cultural depth, transforming what may today be viewed merely as a habit or decorative design into an expression of ancient universal and historical beliefs.

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