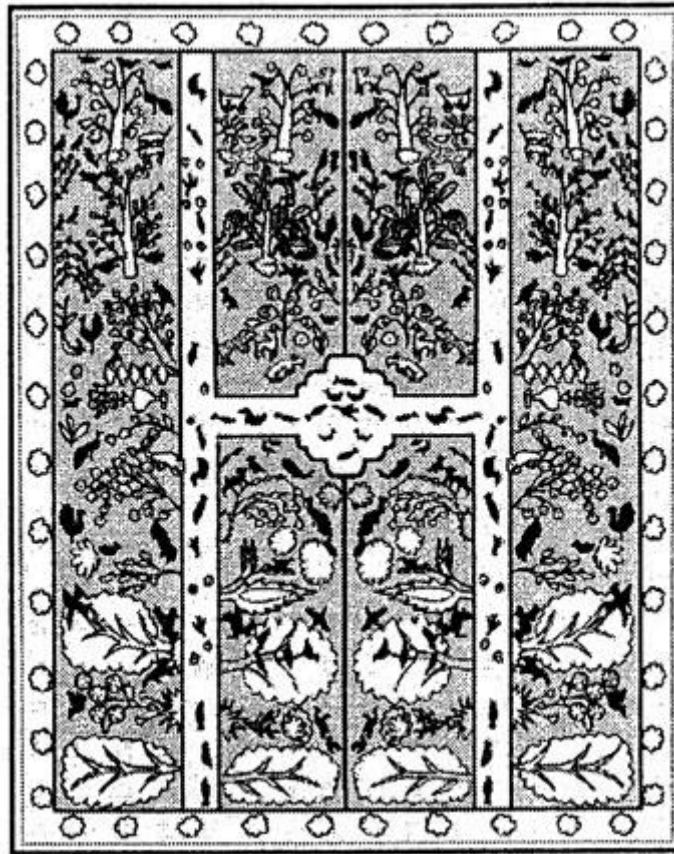


The Garden of Paradise in Islam



"God said: I have prepared for My righteous worshippers that which no eye has seen and no ear has heard, nor has it occurred to a human heart."

(Traditional saying of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him).

Guided by the Quran and the Prophet's traditions, Muslims believe that Paradise is located above the seven heavens and under the sublime Throne of God. It has many degrees of felicity, to which believers are admitted. These include: the Garden of Eternity (*Jannat al-Khuld*), the Garden of Peace (*Jannat al-Salam*), the Garden of Eden (*Jannat 'Adan*), the Garden of Repose (*Jannat al-Ma'awa*), the Garden of Bliss (*Jannat al-Na'im*), all form together the Garden of Paradise (*Al-Firdaus*).

The origin of the word

The English word "*Paradise*" goes back in its origins to the Persian word "*Pairidaeza*" which simply meant a park or an enclosure. This Persian word was first translated into Hebrew as "*Pardes*", which in turn was translated with the Bible into Greek the "*Paradeisos*", and eventually into Latin as "*Paradisus*".

Paradise in the Quran and the Prophet's tradition

"*Djannah*" or "*Jannah*" is the Arabic word for Paradise, which simply means garden. In the Quran (*the holy book of Islam*), Jannah refers to the abode prepared for the righteous to dwell in the Hereafter: "*These will be the dwellers in The Garden where they will remain immortal as a reward for their deeds on earth*" (The Quran, Chapter XLVI. 14)

There are over a hundred and twenty references to Paradise in the 114 chapters of the Quran. The gardens of Eden are described as having rivers that flow beneath its dwellers. Those dwellers

will be adorned with green garments of fine silk and brocade, wearing bracelets of gold, and reclining in comfort and shade. In Paradise there will be no dullness of uniformity, as our minds may conceive it now. But there will be freshness in change from one state of bliss to another, within the unity that God, the One and Only, inspires.

To fully appreciate the rewards God has promised the believers, the relationship between Paradise and Hell-Fire must be explored in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad said: "Paradise and Hell-Fire protested in God's presence. Hell-Fire said: In me are the mighty and the haughty! And Paradise said: In me are the weak and the poor! So God The Almighty judged between them: You are Paradise, My mercy; through you I show mercy to those I wish. And you are Hell-Fire, My punishment; through you I punish those I wish; and it is incumbent upon Me that each of you shall have its fill."

One of the most important sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, with regards to Paradise is: "The Garden of Paradise lies beneath our mothers' feet".

Jesus Christ has a special place in Islamic spirituality. One reference relates to Paradise: Issa The Messiah, peace be upon him, was asked by some of his followers: "Show us an act by which we may enter paradise." He replied, "Do not speak at all." They said, "We cannot do this!" Jesus replied, "Then speak only good."

Paradise in Islamic Art

Artistically, the celestial Paradise represents the perfect harmony between man and nature. Muslim gardeners and craftsmen have been inspired by this ideal and have discovered and adapted many ways to cultivate, nurture and depict this perfect harmony. Therefore a formal garden design has evolved, inspired by the descriptions of Paradise in Islamic traditions, especially the interpretation of the description in Chapter 55, verses 46-77 in the Quran.

Paradise consists of four water channels meeting at the centre of the garden where a water pool is located. The four quarters of the garden, or four gardens - "*chahar bagh*" in Persian - are planted with a variety of flowerbeds, shrubs and trees, with walkways and pavilions dispersed amongst them. The garden is always surrounded and enclosed by high walls, creating an exclusive blissful retreat. The garden has beautiful birds; the water channels have fish and waterfowl. The trees bear sweet fruits, and the flowers have the sweetest scents.

These formal gardens are beautifully described and depicted in Persian and Indian poetry and miniature paintings, as well as on carpets. During the 16th and 17th century, the Safavids of Iran and the Mughals of India were particularly interested in gardening.

Between 1508 and 1509 AD Babur, (later the Mughal Emperor of India) built his famous Garden of Fidelity outside Kabul in today's Afghanistan. He had been very interested in plants and listed what he had observed in his travels in India and Central Asia. His grandson, Akbar (reigned 1556 - 1605) ordered the publication of his grandfather's memoirs in the "*Baburnama*" with miniature paintings depicting the gardens and plants Babur laid out and cultivated in his time.

To complete the garden experience, carpets were woven with patterns and colours inspired by nature and its flora and fauna and the expectations of the celestial Paradise. These floor coverings were designed to capture the delights of nature during spring and summer, to be enjoyed during the winter months when nature, in a generally dry climate, is less exciting. This seasonal use of carpets changes the atmosphere of interior spaces and adapts them to the needs of inhabitants and users during the different times of the year.

Sir William Burrell's "Wagner Garden" Carpet

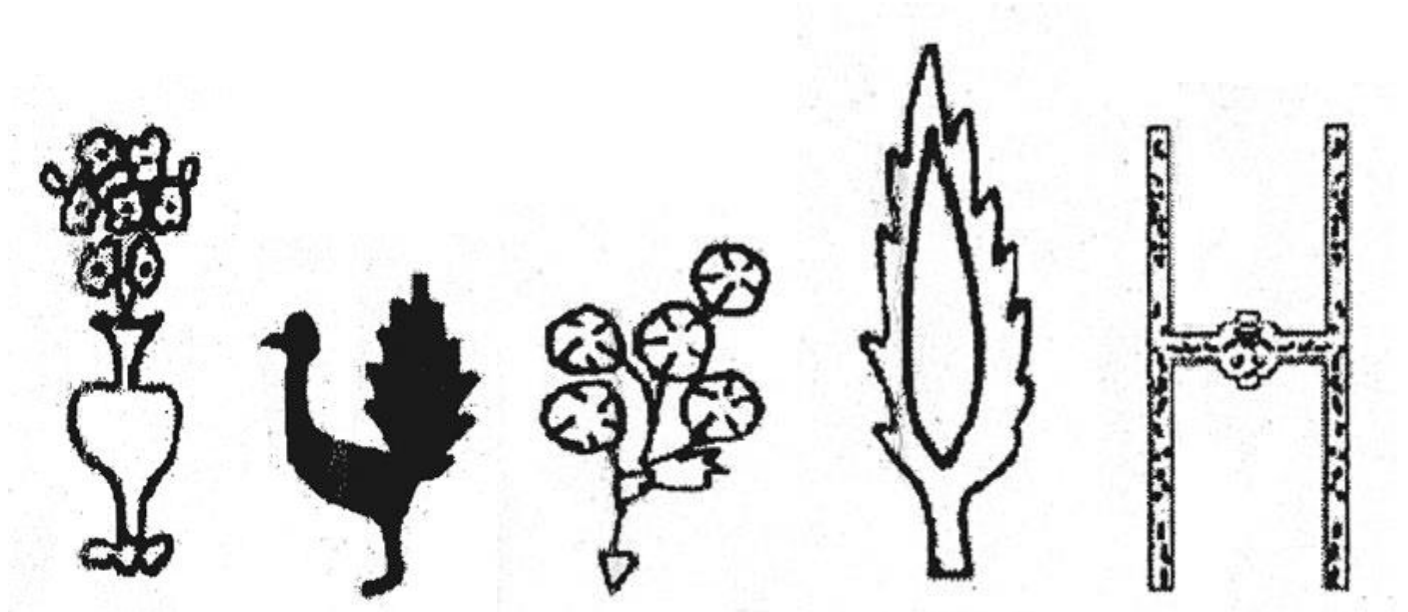
Though not on display at present due to its large size, The Wagner Garden carpet has been a main source of inspiration for Muslim community members in Glasgow and Edinburgh while working on the "Paradise Garden Carpet Project" textile hangings, which were made during the autumn and winter of 2002 - 2003.

It is a good example of the formal layout of a Paradise garden carpet, though slightly unusual in comparison to other surviving examples. It is one of the three earliest known examples of Garden Carpets, and was made in the late 17th century in the province of Kirman, southeast Iran. The other two carpets of this genre are the Jaipur carpet and the Figdor Garden carpet both of which were also made in the 17th century.

The Wagner Garden carpet is formally designed with a bird's-eye view of an ideal garden layout, with water channels, a central pool, trees, flowers, and animals.



Some of the symbols and their spiritual meanings derived from Sufi mystic interpretations:



Flowers, Peacock, Roses, Cyprus Tree, Water channels

- **Water** is the symbol for purification and of life itself.
- **The Four Rivers** carry the ever-fresh and non-intoxicating water, milk, honey, and wine of Paradise.
- **The Tree of Knowledge** (sometimes called the Tree of Life) is a cosmic tree, which has grown from the seed of God's divine command 'Be' and exists in Paradise. It sends down its roots and sends up its trunk, "spreading out its branches so that this world, the world of Symbols, and the world of Archetypes, are all contained by this Tree."
- **The Cypress tree** "symbolizes potential wholeness, for biologically it is a tree which contains the masculine and feminine principles within itself." It is known as the "perfect Muslim" because of its submission (Islam) to the wind.

- **The Peacock** represents the "self" and its relationship with its creator. In Sufi mystic iconography, the peacock with its tail outspread represents in its transformation "the infinite richness of Divine Beauty, expansive and resplendent."
- **Flowers** are not admired for their individual beauty as much as for them being part of what makes nature; which in itself is a symbol of the spirit of God.
- **Roses** are of special significance to Muslims because, according to tradition, a rose was formed "from a drop of perspiration that formed on the prophet Muhammad's brow during his heavenly journey [Al-Isra'a wa Al-Mi'raj]."

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This leaflet was prepared by Noorah Al-Gallani, Curator - Islamic Civilisations, Cultural & Leisure Services (Museums), Glasgow City Council, based at The Burrell Collection, 2060 Pollockshaws Road, Glasgow G43 1 AT, Tel. 0141 287 2550; Fax. 0141 287 2597