

The Eagle Symbol in Antique Turkmen Woven Art

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Introduction

For ancient Turks and the nomadic tribes of Turkmenistan, the eagle was more than just a bird; it represented power, wisdom, and divine protection. In antique Turkmen rugs and woven arts, the eagle appears not just as a decorative motif but as a deeply symbolic and mythological figure. In this article, we explore the origins of the eagle symbol, how it was manifested in tribal art, and its continuing presence in Turkmen culture.

1. Historical and Mythological Roots

In the ancient Tengrism beliefs of the Turkic peoples, the eagle served as a mediator between heaven and earth, a messenger of the sky god. The eagle was also portrayed as a shamanic spirit guide and protector. Before the advent of Islam, the eagle's ascent to the skies symbolized spiritual purification and connection with higher powers.

2. Symbolism in Tribal Identity

Among Turkmen tribes—especially the Tekke, Salor, Yomut, and Ersari—the eagle symbol was integrated into tribal emblems and rug designs. It is rarely depicted literally; instead, wings, talons, and head shapes are stylized into 'gül' motifs and border elements. The eagle signifies tribal strength, warrior spirit, and masculine energy.

3. Design Interpretation in Woven Works

Visual and technical analysis of how the eagle is represented in woven works: Wing-like symmetrical forms within gül motifs. Eagle-like heads appear at the center or corners of ensi and chuval pieces. Border bands sometimes include beak- or talon-shaped decorations.

4. Cross-Cultural Parallels

The use of the eagle symbol is not unique to the Turkmen. Similar motifs appear in the weaving traditions of the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek peoples. Eagle feathers were used in shamanic costumes and rituals. Ancient Scythian and Saka art also features bronze and stone reliefs resembling eagle figures.

5. Contemporary Reflection and Legacy

Today, the eagle continues to appear in Turkmenistan's national symbols. Traditional weaving schools and modern artistic practices are reinterpreting eagle motifs. Rare antique pieces in museums—especially the Turkmen Carpet Museum and Russian ethnographic collections—preserve these designs.

Conclusion

The eagle is not only aesthetically significant in Turkmen textile arts, but also deeply spiritual and cultural. Studying its presence in antique weavings helps us understand it not as a relic of the past, but as a living cultural emblem.

