

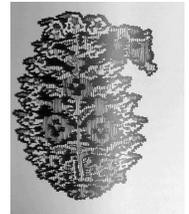
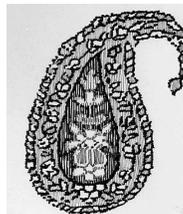
The *Boteh* motif in oriental carpets will be the topic for this paper. Its progeny originates in ancient Chaldea (Babylon) and has from there spread onto a great historical lineage that passes through time and cultures far removed from its ancient beginnings. It has become increasingly complex and refined and has turned up in every realm of fashion. This paper is an effort to examine the humble beginnings of the *Boteh* motif found in oriental carpets and will include (through what I feel necessary) a time line of the evolution and possible revolutions that came from the influence of its decedent, *Paisley*.

*Boteh*, as it turns out, when literally translated means “flower” of which in large part its inspiration comes from. The Chaldeans saw the date palm of their region as a tree of life which was in no small part essential to their mode of existence. This palm tree provided them with food, wine, thatch for their houses, wood, paper, and string. For all this, the ‘boteh’ of the tree comes to represent for the Chaldeans a symbol of prosperity and abundance like our western world counterpart, the ‘horn of plenty.’ It is from this formula that the *Boteh* motif must be understood to properly understand its true ancient origin and perhaps a subconscious right which for so many years has relegated the design to mostly feminine connotations.

It is because of trade and war among the civilizations of the ancient Near-East that led to the expansion and proliferation of the *Boteh* motif. From ancient Chaldea, this motif was traded into more northern parts of the Near-East region, and copied by the migrant tribes of Persia and those of the Transcaucasis. The design was in effect spread throughout the entire Near-East in this way. The *Boteh* motif then became altered in many different through the various weaving techniques and the relative skills of the different tribes’ weavers, while preserving the same basic idea as represented in the three figures at the lower right.

Left figure: from Kashan Carpet

Center: Senneh Carpet, Right: Mir Carpet



Through this era of development the *Boteh* motif was commonly used in all carpet traditions including court carpets, prayer rugs, tribal and domestic weavings, and were later produced by the Cottage Industry and as Workshop products. The *Boteh* motif is one that has for all intents and purposes not even flickered since its inception into Near-East cultural weavings. It has become a traditional Icon in carpets rivaled only by a few other motifs including *Guls*, *Joshaqan*, *Harshang*, *Mina Khani*, *Zil-I-Soltan*, *Shah Arbassi*, and the most popular *Herati* motif.

It is also because of war in the Near-East with Kashmir, India that the *Boteh* motif found its second revolution in shawl production which primed the design for a more worldly expansion. The Mughals, who inhabited the vast Central steppe, conquered Kashmir in 1586. Under their rule the arts blossomed and likewise shawl industries grew. Weavers were brought in from the Eastern Turkestan where the type of weave later used for Kashmir shawls was practiced (twill-tapestry technique). Still produced by hand, these shawls were amazing in their splendor and would take a weaver up to three years to produce a single piece because of the challenging technicality of the weave and design itself. These shawls are arguably more complex than most carpets of their *Boteh* motif parental lineages and were eventually brought to the European and American markets just as the other traditions of carpets had found homes.

The East India Company of Britain saw the possibility for a market among the wealthy classes of England in the shawls and brought some back to home shores. This introduction of the *Boteh* motif, or 'Pine' motif as the Indians would have it, led to profound spreading and acceptance of the design which altered the face of fashion in many ways.

First, it should be mentioned that the roots of the *Paisley* pattern show up rather early in Celtic designs, far before this latter 1770's introduction of the *Boteh* motif into the European

market by the East India Company. The early use of the 'Paisley' pattern in the figure of the *Desborough Mirror* (at right) illustrates the ideas of design which prevailed in the Islands off the west coast of Europe before the Roman and Greek influences brought by the Roman Empire began to prevail. Because of the Roman Empire the Celtic lineage was crushed and forgotten and remained dormant in the arts and crafts of Europe, until the flourishing textile industry of Paisley Scotland in the early to mid 1800's. Because of the wildly accepted *Boteh* motif through the introduction of the Kashmir made shawls an attempt to produce the shawl product was made and through machine made production came an imbued symbiosis to the two flora based patterns of *Boteh* motif and paisley. Paisley Scotland already had the knowhow of its infamous plaids and initially produced less than desirable shawl products for market. With time and the introduction of the *Jacquard Loom* in France, the products became undeniably comparable to the high quality hand made products of Kashmir. The ultimate effect was a lower cost of production, no need for import, and the increased sales and popularity of the *Boteh* motif.



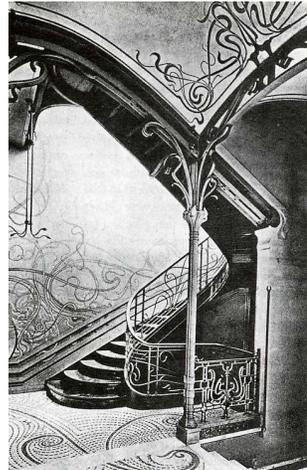
Interestingly, just a few years after the introduction of the *Boteh* motif shawls to Britain by the East India Company, Napoleon Bonaparte had come to the Near-East in conquest and had brought back his own findings of the *Boteh* motif shawls. These very same designs the Scots were producing were being introduced by Napoleon to the future fashion capitol, Paris, -the effects of which would be great. The *Jacquard Loom* produced a prolific amount of designs throughout France and Britain and were quickly absorbed into the consciousness of Europeans as a popular design element as far as Vienna (example of Jacquard piece at right). On two fronts the *Boteh* motif expanded, and in France ran concurrently with a new notion of national identity.



It seems to me that the direction of this renaissance of the ‘Paisley design,’ as it is called now, might have had profound effects on different areas of design as a possible well-spring in the subconsciousness of the architects and artists of Europe around the 1890's and in America at the about the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is extremely relevant to the time of *Paisley* at its apex of influence as the ‘Hundred Year Fashion’ at the time of the *Art Nouveau* styles’ development, and may be seen as a triumph of the Celtic pattern over the ancient classicism which had dominated Europe from the times of the Roman Empire. That is to say, the new universal is found in the language of art and architecture through the fundamental combination of two old orders of design, Celtic *Paisley* and the *Boteh* motif, and they are synergistically combined to redefine stylistic orders and definitions in the then Modern Western World (Examples below).



Above: Louis Sullivan, Detail of cast-iron ornament on the facade of the Carson Pirie Scott and Company department store, Chicago. C.1903-4



Center: Victor Horta, Stairwell of interior, Tassel House, Brussels. 1892-93



Full Right: Hector Guimard, Entrance to the Porte Dauphine Metropolitan station, Paris. 1901

The whiplash line and curvilinear emphasis found in the great works of *Art Nouveau* especially in that of architecture seem to be inextricably connected with *Paisley* and the *Boteh* motif concerning their design contexts as a flora basis.

Moving back to the textile market of an ever modern and advancing Europe, we see a

'Paisley pattern' that has been flourishing quite well since 1870. *Paisley* has been used in almost every branch of manufacturing since this early time from embroidery on silk underwear, to the pattern of high-quality carpeting. In the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it enjoyed a revival in the United States with a New York based firm which hand-printed lengths of silk with designs that were copied from actual *Paisley* shawls (A process of creativity not unlike the early methods of copy by the hands of the ancient carpet weavers). The silk of this time was advised for dress gowns and was used particularly in the linings of Opera cloaks. *Paisley* again arose to the height of Fashion in the United States in the 1960's when vogue was *Paisley* everything. In the 1960's *Paisley* could be found on a person from head to toe, and in the interiors of homes from the fabric of sofas to wallpaper and dinner plates. It is also during the 1960's that *Paisley* finally became truly bisexual as a motif, an unconscious effect of the roots of feminism and that of the sexual revolution. Men of course can still be seen today sporting *Paisley* neck-ties on a frequent basis.

There must exist an archetypal affinity to *Boteh* motif that has allowed it to have survived through multiple cultures and over two millennia of time. The reason for this affinity is the *Boteh* motif is a pure and universal form. What I mean by that, past the simple idea that it represents a plant, is the depth of infinity that its curl-shape represents, -like a fractal. Aside from being just cute and interesting in its shape, I propose that the shape of the *Boteh* motif may be interpreted as the suggestion of a spiral. Not unlike Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* 1969-70 or F. L. Wright's *Guggenheim Museum*, New York City, the curve of the *Boteh* turns into a slight curve and diminishes to a point of infinity like a spiral. It is infinity which is the most ironic about this motif in that it has stood the test of time and has become more timeless than most anything outside of human necessity. As such, the *Boteh* motif is from the Ancients, an antiquity of design which proudly animates its own timelessness within its own design.

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