

The Chatr as a Political Symbol in Islamic Miniature Painting

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ABSTRACT

In the past, individuals with wealth, power, and status have used various symbols to display their authority. One of the symbols used by rulers for a period was the umbrella-shaped canopy called chatr. The origins of the chatr can be traced back to Mesopotamia. Later, during the Islamic civilisation, it continued to be used as a symbol of power. While details about using the chatr as a symbol of power can be found in various historical sources, its reflection in visual culture, particularly in Islamic miniature painting, is also evident. The fact that the chatr is carried by angels in some illustrations suggests that it was attributed a sense of holiness. In this context, the study examines depictions of the chatr and chatrdar as symbols representing the sovereignty of rulers. Illustrations reflecting the chatr culture are predominantly found in manuscripts produced in the Iranian cultural sphere, particularly in works such as the *Shahnameh* and *Khamsa* of Nizami. The chatr, which also holds an important place in Indian culture, appears in many illustrated albums featuring various governors and rulers. As indicated in historical sources, the form and function of the chatr, a significant symbol of sovereignty in the Iranian, Seljuk, and Abbasid civilisations, are beautifully represented in Islamic miniature painting. Every detail, from the shape of the chatr to its use and bearer, is meticulously depicted in these artworks.

Keywords: Islamic art, visual sovereignty, chatr, canopy, chatrdar, royal iconography

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, humanity has expressed feelings, thoughts, and ideas through writing, sounds, and visual techniques. Although written and oral cultures have traditionally been more widespread, visual culture, which conveys a wide range of emotions and ideas, tends to attract greater attention. In today's world, especially in branding, different objects and shapes represent various meanings, people, or institutions, just as they did in the past (Redford 2014; Doğan 2024; Çaycı 2017).

One of the items used in the past as a symbol of power, in addition to its primary function, is the chatr (an umbrella-shaped canopy). The word originally comes from Sanskrit (Merçil 2007, 104), and in Persian dictionaries, it means “umbrella” or “tent” (Şükün 1984, 687). Şemseddin Sami also described the chatr as a tent, specifically an umbrella-shaped object held over a person to protect him or her from the sun (Sami 1998, 506). In some periods, this type of umbrella was used more as a symbol of power and wealth than for its actual function. Other terms such as çetir, sayvan, sayeban, sayepuş, baldaken were also used for the chatr (Pakalın 1983, 357; Arseven 1983, 390; Anonymous 1997, 398), which was traditionally known as a decorated canopy held over the heads of rulers. The person beneath the chatr was considered to possess a special kinship and closeness to the sun because of his or her authority and merit (Ersoy 2000, 368). Visually, it also functioned like a halo, emphasising that person’s elevated status.

Important persons would sit on the thrones surrounded by servants holding parasols decorated with colourful feathers. This phenomenon is a symbol of elegance and wealth in Chinese tradition. It drew people’s attention not to the sun above, but rather to the person beneath the parasol (Taneri 1993, 293–294; Ersoy 2000, 368). The following information is provided about the form of the chatr: “It is in the shape of a tent. It is carried by the eldest emir (governor) over the head of the caliph during processions. It is mounted on a pike measuring three and a half cubits in length. The chatr has 12 sections. The space between its sections is the width of one hand span. These sections are attached to a golden ring at the top” (Pakalın 1983, 357). The person who stands slightly behind the sultan and holds the chatr above the ruler’s head is called a *çetrdâr* or *çetrî* (Merçil 2007, 106).

Significant information on the culture of chatr and chatrdar in Islamic civilisation can be found especially in the historical works of Erdoğan Merçil (2007, 103–116) and Mehmet Zeki Pakalın (1983, 357). However, no independent study has been conducted on the visual representation of this culture. In some studies, the term “umbrella” has been used in place of chatr, which results in a loss of its symbolic meaning. Although some studies have retained the term chatr, it has not been adequately considered as a symbol of sovereignty. Based on examples from Islamic painting, this study explores the representation of chatr and chatrdar culture in visual depictions. In this context, the details of chatr culture, as illustrated by the *nakkash* (artists and painters) of the period, can be observed more clearly.

This research investigates the cultures and historical periods in which the chatr was used as a symbol of power. Specifically, it seeks to address how and in which regions it was employed within Islamic civilisation. Although historical texts provide information about the chatr and its symbolic use, no independent studies have been found that specifically focus on its representation in paintings. Furthermore, some studies describe the chatr merely as a functional umbrella used for practical purposes. In this context, the study aims to reveal how the chatr was depicted in illustrated manuscripts produced within Persian culture, particularly during the 15th and 16th centuries AD in the Islamic world. Thus, an aspect that is present in the literature but largely overlooked in visual analyses of miniatures will be clarified.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This study employs a comparative iconographic and visual analysis method grounded in art historical inquiry. The primary material consists of selected Persianate and Indo-Persian illustrated manuscripts and album pages in which the chatr appears as a prominent visual element. The research examples are from the *Shahnameh*, *The Khamsa of Nizami*, the *Golestan*, the *Iskandarnameh*, and selected *muraqqa* albums preserved in libraries and museums such as the Topkapi Palace Museum Library, the British Library, the Bodleian Library, the Golestan Palace Library, the Museum of Turkish-Islamic Art, and related collections.

The visual material was selected according to three criteria: first, the identifiable presence of a chatr or canopy; second, its association with a ruler, royal figure, envoy, or individual of elevated status; and third, its relevance for analysing concepts of sovereignty, hierarchy, protection, or sacralised authority. The study places particular emphasis on images produced in Persianate and Indo-Persian contexts between the 15th and 17th centuries AD. Earlier Mesopotamian, Anatolian, Achaemenid, and Lycian examples are addressed only as historical precedents, in order to outline the long-term symbolic genealogy of the chatr as a sign of rulership.

Chatr in Ancient Anatolian and Mesopotamian Civilisations

The earliest examples of the chatr culture, seen in Anatolian and Mesopotamian civilisations, were also used as a symbol of power in many societies from East to West in different periods. The earliest example of the chatr dates back to the Assyrian civilisation, around 2000 BC (Torkaman 2018, 78). Shalmaneser III in the relief on the Black Obelisk, dated 858–824 BC, now in the British Museum (Figure 1), is shown together with Jehu, King of Israel, who begs for mercy. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III appears in ceremonial attire beneath the chatr, holding a bowl in his right hand and the hilt of his sword in his left. In the scene, Jehu is depicted as unresisting while seeking mercy; to the left of the composition stands the chatrdar holding the chatr over the king, while on the opposite side officials are shown carrying his weapons and using a fan (Sevin 2014, 56; Zimansky 2018, 234). The use of the chatr is also found in the reliefs of the Urartian period, a civilisation established in the same region. In the seal-shaped relief called “Bulla” (Figure 2), the Urartian king Rusa (685–645 BC) is depicted walking under a chatr carried by an attendant (Zimansky 2018, 244; Akdağ 2021, 138–139). This evidence indicates that the chatr functioned as a symbol of sovereignty in the region over a long historical span.

Founded by the Persian King Darius I (522–486 BC) in the sixth century (Garthwaite 2011, 32–49). Persepolis—also known as the Throne of Jamshid—served as the capital of the Persian Empire and became renowned for its richly decorated reliefs. Among these reliefs, depictions of the chatr and chatrdars are also present. One such example shows King Xerxes I, son and successor of Darius, walking beneath a chatr held by a chatrdar (Shahbazi 2013, 146–173). In this relief, one of the officials behind the king carries a fan, while another holds a chatr (Figure 3).



Figure 1 The Assyrian King Shalmaneser III, British Museum in London.

Source: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1848-1104-1 (03/01/20259).



Figure 2 The Assyrian King Shalmaneser III, British Museum in London.

Source: Kibar Akdağ (2021, 139).



Figure 3 The Persian King Xerxes I, Ancient City of Persopolis.

Source: Alireza Shapur Shahbazi (2013, 155).



Figure 4 Arbinas receives emissaries, Nereid Monument, British Museum in London.

Source: Lindsay Allen (2005:96).

In the subsequent period, the use of the chatr is also observed among the Lycians. The Nereid Monument, dated to 390–380 BC and located in the ancient city of Xanthos near Kaş—an important centre of the Lycian period—depicts the reception of official visitors by the Lycian dynast Arbinas (Allen 2005, 96; Taneri 1993, 293–294; Courtills 2011, 36–53). On the monument, Arbinas is shown seated on a small stool beneath a chatr (Figure 4).

Chatr and Chatrdars in Islamic Civilisation

The chatr, as a symbol of sovereignty, was widely used not only in Mesopotamian civilisations and Europe but also across various Asian cultures, particularly by rulers. The earliest examples of its use are found in Assyrian royal iconography, where the chatr is depicted being held above the king's head while he stands, walks, rides in a chariot, or participates in hunting scenes. This symbolic practice was later adopted by ancient Iranians and subsequently by several Islamic states, beginning with the Umayyads. Historical records indicate that during the Abbasid period, certain individuals were specifically responsible for the manufacture of the chatr. Even during the reign of Caliph Mūsā'īn-Billāh (AD 862–866), the chatr was under the control of Emir Yīnūḳ (Bīnū) al-Fergānī, who was of Turkic origin (Taneri 1993, 293).

The chatr, known to have been used in Muslim-Turkish states, was regarded as a symbol of sovereignty. In the Qarakhanid period, it was also considered one of the symbols of war, carried onto battlefields, and the chatr of rulers is recorded as being red in colour (Arslan 2012, 87). During the Seljuk Empire period, the chatr, a symbol of power, was carried over the ruler's head. Kutalmish, a member of the Seljuk dynasty who struggled for the sultanate against Alp Arslan (AD 1063–1072), also used a chatr. During the battle between them, Alp Arslan's commander captured Kutalmish's chatr and defeated them. As in this example, the loss of the chatr symbolised defeat in battle. Members of the dynasty could use the chatr, a symbol of sovereignty, with the permission of the sultan. Sultan Sanjar is known to have used the chatr while he was still a prince. Similarly, the Sultans of Iraq and rebellious *shahzades* also employed the chatr as a symbol of their sovereignty. There are also expressions such as *çetr-i hümayun*, *çetr-i jihangir*, *çetr-i mubarak*, *çetr-i şahinşah*, *çetr-i sultanate* in Seljuks (Taneri 1993, 293–294).

Sources also indicate that an *alem* (finial) could be placed on top of the chatr. The chatr finials of the Anatolian Seljuk sultans were often shaped like eagles, and it is evident that Muslim Turks also used mythological animals as finials for chatrs and tents. In Islamic civilisation, the gifts presented by rulers to state officials who achieved significant success included caftans known

as *hil'at* (Yaman 2018, 47–50), swords, and even chatrs themselves (Taneri 1993, 293–294). The Abbasid caliphs used to send a chatr to the Seljuk rulers along with other items symbolising sovereignty. It has been noted that the colour of the chatr always matched the garments worn by the caliph (Pakalın 1983, 358). Moreover, during battles, the location and condition of the chatr were important. Soldiers would pay attention to the chatr from time to time to determine the ruler's location. It is known that it was an important sign of sovereignty in the period of the Anatolian Seljuks; in this respect, when the rulers and the public encounter it, they would dismount from their horses or bow their faces to the ground as a sign of respect and obedience to the sultan.

The role of the chatr in warfare is also interesting. Even if accidental, the fall of the chatr could influence the outcome of a battle (Merçil 2007, 104–115, 242). Ibn Bibi's frequent use of the expression *çetr-i hümayun* instead of the Seljuk administration in his work demonstrates the significance of the chatr as a symbol of power (Ibn Bibi 2014, 99, 134, 135, 191, 239). The fall of the chatr, in any form, could be interpreted both as a sign and a possible cause of the army's collapse. This symbolic association is also reflected in a 16th-century AD painting depicting the defeat and death of Darā, in which the fallen chatr serves as an emblem of defeat (Hasanzade et al. 2021, 340; Kerimov 1983, 111–112) (Figure 5). The chatr is occasionally depicted in a closed position, as seen in the hunting scene (*The Khamsa of Nizami*, Topkapi Palace Museum Library, H. 781, f. 16r) (Figure 6), caravan scene (Anthology, Topkapi Palace Museum Library, R. 1976, f. 97r), and Khusraw at the castle of Shirin (*The Khamsa of Nizami*, British Library, Or. 13297, f. 80).

However, it is noteworthy that the umbrella-shaped chatr, which was widely used as a symbol of power and sovereignty in ancient Anatolian civilisations as well as in pre-Ottoman Turkish and Muslim states, did not continue in the same form within Ottoman civilisation. In fact, the use of the chatr is not prominently seen in pre-Ottoman Anatolia or during the Byzantine period. Nevertheless, a different form of the chatr did exist in the Ottoman Empire. In order to emphasise the grandeur of the ruler or other important individuals and to distinguish them from ordinary people, a canopy associated with tent culture, known as the *çetr-i hümayun*, was employed (Atasoy 2002, 50–51). Numerous examples of this type of canopy tent, known as the *çetr-i hümayun*, can be observed in visual depictions. As Pakalın notes, “although the umbrella was an object derived and adapted from the Turks' chatr, the Ottoman Turks did not use umbrellas” (Pakalın 1983, 353).



Figure 5 The death of Darā, *Iskandarnameh* (16th century AD).

Source: National Library of Russia collection, MS. Dorn 344, f.35.

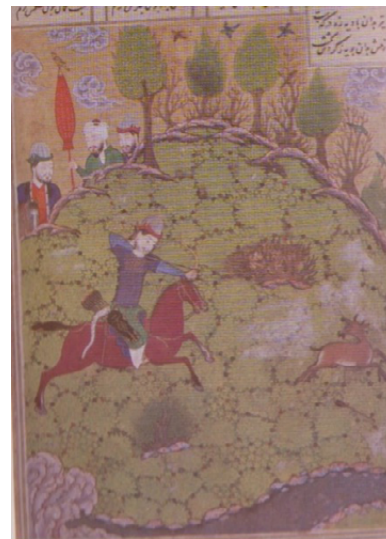


Figure 6 Hunting scene, *The Khamsa of Nizami* (1445–1446).

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, H. 781, f. 16r.

Chatr and Chatrdars in Islamic Art of Depiction

In this study, as many illustrated manuscripts as possible from Islamic civilisation were examined in relation to representations of the chatr. Examples of chatr depictions were identified primarily in manuscripts produced in the Persian and Indian regions; however, no examples were found in Ottoman painting, particularly in works produced in Istanbul.

The concentration of chatr depictions in Persian and Indian manuscripts of the 15th and 16th centuries AD suggests that the chatr functioned as an important symbol specifically in these regions during this period. The study draws upon identified paintings depicting the chatr and highlights their most significant features.

According to the depictions, it is seen that in some civilisations in Islamic culture, the chatr was a serious symbol of sovereignty. In the 1560 copy of the *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi (Firdevsî 2016, 873–875), which depicts the battle between Gav and Talhand (Figure 7), both Gav and Talhand are shown mounted on elephants beneath separate chatrs carried by their respective chatrdars. Given the prominence of the chatr, it is possible that it was regarded as a sacred object. Although the chatr functioned in practice as a canopy resembling an umbrella, its symbolic role as an emblem of sovereignty also evokes associations with the “shadow of the Arch,” which is believed to take place after the apocalypse in Islamic culture.

According to the narration, on the Day of Judgement, people will gather and stand for a thousand years. Their right and left sides will be exposed to intense heat, and on that day there will be no shade except the shade of the Throne (*arsh*) and the shade of *sadaqah*. Whoever sincerely declares “*La ilaha illallah Muhammadun rasulullah*” (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah) will be among those who find refuge in the shade of the Throne (*Ahwal-i Qiyamat*, Süleymaniye Library, Hafid Efendi, f. 32r–32v). The shadow of the Throne, mentioned in the manuscripts of *Ahwal-i Qiyamat*, is illustrated only in the copy of the Berlin State Library (Figure 8). Although the canopy held by an angel does not resemble a chatr and instead takes the form of a cloth covering, it ultimately functions as a protective shade against the sun. As can be seen in some chatr scenes, a conceptual link appears to be established between the chatr and the “shadow of the Throne.” In a 17th-century AD Hindu album, two angels are depicted holding a chatr above the clouds for a figure who appears to be a ruler (Figure 9). Similarly, in the 16th-century AD Solomon scroll (H. 2153) held at the Topkapı Palace Museum Library, an angel is shown holding a chatr over the Prophet Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Bilqis (Figure 10).



Figure 7 Gav and Talhand, *Shahnameh* (1560).

Source: Library of Congress collection, Cod. Per. 10, No. 2021667229, f. 647v.



Figure 8 Shadow of the Arch,
Ahwal-i Qiyamat (17th century).

Source: Berlin State Library collection, Ms. Or. Oct.
1596, f. 30r.



Figure 9 Chatr being held by angels,
Album (17th century).

Source: Oxford, Bodleian Library collection, MS.
Douce Or. A. 1, f. 18v.



Figure 10 The Prophet Solomon and Bilqis, Album (16th century).

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, H. 2153, f. 164r-165v.

In addition, when Sultan Gıyaseddin (1192–1211 AD) arrived in Diyarbakır and was welcomed by Melik Salih, the ruler of the city, the statement “When his eye fell on the Sultan’s blessed chatr, he immediately dismounted from his horse” (Ibn Bibi 2014, 73) suggests that the chatr was considered sacred. The attribution of such sacredness to the chatr is intended to increase the power and influence of the rulers in the eyes of the public.

The chatr, which in European culture was largely associated with status and wealth, functioned as a strictly royal symbol in the regions extending from Iran to India, as well as in the civilisations that established political authority there. Interestingly, the chatr was also used in the Turkish civilisations that dominated the region, but this tradition was abandoned when the Turks settled in Anatolia. It was probably abandoned because the Byzantine culture, which was dominant in Anatolia at that period, did not have the chatr culture. Although the use of the throne, weapon, sorghum and some other items as symbols of sovereignty is seen in the depictions of Ottoman sultans, no portrait of a sultan or depiction of a sultan with an umbrella-shaped chatr has been identified (Raby 1999). In addition, no depiction of the use of chatr in Ottoman culture has been identified in the available illustrated manuscripts. The chatr/umbrella, which is absent from illustrated depictions of daily life in Ottoman civilisation, is likewise not represented in engravings portraying scenes from everyday Ottoman life (Sevim 2002a; 2002b; 2002c). The most important manuscripts in the Islamic art of depiction that include images related to the

use of the chatr as a symbol of power are the copies of the *Shahnameh* written by Ferdowsi. In addition to the *Shahnameh* manuscripts, the use of chatr, which is seen in copies such as *Khusraw and Shirin*, *The Khamsa of Nizami*, and *Iskandarnameh* (Bağcı 1989), is mostly seen in paintings about stories and events involving Persian culture.

The Use of Alem in the Chatr

“Alem” is a type of symbol worn on top of flags, banners, domes, spires, and roofs. In pictorial depictions, shapes similar to the alem are generally seen on the tops of the chatr. The statement in the sources that this reign umbrella, which opens like a small dome at the end of a spear, is topped with a “golden ball” (Taneri 1993, 293) confirms the use of an alem at the top of the chatr. While there are depictions of chatrs without the shape of an alem and with conical tops (Figure 11), the chatrs in the paintings depicting Khusraw’s visit to Shirin (Nizamî 1994, 265–269) and the old woman’s complaint to Sultan Sanjar (Nizamî 1946, 81–82) are adorned with knob-shaped alems, which are more commonly seen in mosques. While the knobs in the form of alems are quite glorious as in the *Shahnameh* example (Figure 12), they are also similar to a “rumi” form as in *The Khamsa of Nizami* examples (Figure 13).

It is also known that the chatr alems of the Anatolian Seljuk sultans were in the form of eagles, and that Muslim Turks used mythological animals as chatr and tent alems (Taneri 1993, 293–294). In the analysed chatr examples, there are many bird-shaped alems. Although it may also be due to their small size, as in the depictions of Gushtâsp plays chovgan before Qayşar (Figure 14) and Siavash passing through the fire (Firdevsî 2017, 423–426) (Figure 15), these bird figures are thought to symbolise eagles, even though they do not closely resemble the eagle depictions characteristic of Seljuk art. Ibn Bibi expresses that “the eagle of the sovereign’s chatr stretched its wing of fortune and its feathers to the sun of the sultans and spread its shadow of might”



Figure 11 Sultan Sanjar and the old woman, *The Khamsa of Nizami* (1585).

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, III. Ahmed 3559, f. 20r.



Figure 12 Khusraw at the castle of Shirin, *Shahnameh* (16th century).

Source: The Walters Art Museum collection, W.610, l 189.



Figure 13 Sultan Sanjar and the old woman, *The Khamsa of Nizami*.

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, R. 865, f. 17r.

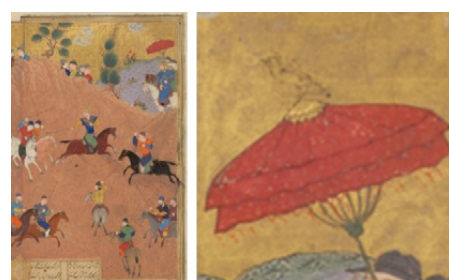


Figure 14 Gushtâsp plays chovgan before Qayşar, *Shahnameh* (1444).

Source: Cambridge University Library collection, MS RAS 239, f. 252r.



Figure 15 Siavash passing through the fire, *Shahnameh* (1522–1535).

Source: Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art collection, f. 166r.



Figure 16 Khusraw at the castle of Shirin, *Shahnameh* (1400).

Source: National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution collection, No. F1931.36.

(Ibn Bibi 2014, 172, 236, 260). The bird figures appearing in the alem, which appear prominently both in the 1400 manuscript of *Khusraw and Shirin* (Figure 16) and in the *Shahnameh* of the first half of the 15th and 16th centuries AD and Hunting scene (Figure 6), are more reminiscent of a hawk than an eagle.

Chatr Examples According to Their Forms

Four main components of the chatr can be identified: the hilt, ribs, cover, and alem. The sticks attached to the ribs, which usually enable the chatr to open, do not often appear in the depiction examples. However, in certain depictions, such as the chatr used in the scene of Gustap playing the chovgan (Figure 14), there are also examples showing the sticks connecting the hilt and the parts of the rib (Album, MS. Douce Or. C. 4, f. 28r; Album, MS. Ouseley Add. 167; *The Khamsa of Nizami*, H. 762, 12a).

In these examples, the chatr and the hilt are a whole, and it is seen that the chatr part is not flexible. The fact that the body and the hilt are separate can be easily understood from the paintings showing that the body of the chatr is balanced even though the hilt of the chatr is inclined. As in the example of the painting (Figure 17) depicting Ardashir's son Shapur playing chovgan (Firdevsî 2017, 496–500), the rib section under the fabric, the number of ribs can be seen as a line in some paintings (Figure 18), but not clear in most examples. The top of the rib is covered with fabric, which is the main part of the chatr. It is stated in the sources that sultan chatrs were usually covered with velvet, or even golden glazed velvet or atlas fabric. It is also known that precious stones were used in the decorations (Taneri 1993, 293; Adıbelli 2024, 129).



Figure 17 Ardashir's son Shapur kicking the ball and his father recognising him, *Shahnameh* (1509).

Source: Museum of Turkish-Islamic Art collection, No. 1955, f. 412v.



Figure 18 Khusraw at the castle of Shirin, *Shahnameh* (1482).

Source: British Library collection, Persian 18.188, f. 476r.



Figure 19 Conical chatr, *Golestan* (1554).

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, H. 673, f. 172r.

No common design or motif has been identified regarding the colour, motifs and composition of the fabrics. Almost all of the surviving examples have a material for the hem part that hangs from the rib part ends of the chatr. Some chatrs even have a double-layered hem, as in the example of the *Shahnameh* dated 1509 (Figure 17). This detail is the most important feature that distinguishes the chatr from the umbrella style.

The analysed chatr examples are generally in the form of a dome. In some examples, it is depicted as a conical cover rather than a dome. This type of design may be due to the simple expression in the drawing, or it may reflect the actual appearance due to the inflexibility of the material used for the chatr ribs. Today, particularly in Southeast Asian cultures, the use of umbrellas with rigid ribs—often constructed primarily from bamboo sticks as decorative accessories—remains significant. Examples of such umbrella forms can be observed in manuscripts such as the *Golestan* (Figure 19) and *Shahnameh* (Figures 17 and 18).

As mentioned earlier, chatr depictions are mostly in the form of a dome. Naturally, for an umbrella to become dome-shaped rather than conical, the ribs must have a flexible structure and bend when stretched. The dome-shaped chatr suggests the use of steel sticks in the ribs. The domed chatr can also be classified into different subtypes: simple domes, pointed domes, and particularly in Central Asian artistic tradition, double-walled, drum-shaped domes.

The most commonly used form is the pointed arch or dome shape. In a 16th-century AD copy of the *Shahnameh* (Yaghoubi 2017, 156–157), the painting depicting the War of Alexander features a chatr in a simple dome form (*Shahnameh*, British Library, 5600, f.24; *The Khamsa of Nizami*, H. 762, f. 12r) (Figure 20). Similarly, in *The Khamsa of Nizami* manuscript dated 1502–1524, numerous examples of dome-shaped chatrs are found (Figure 21), resembling those used in Central Asian Turkish-Islamic civilisations. A notable variation appears in a 17th- to 18th-century AD album preserved in the Bodleian Library, where the chatr held over Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1618–1707) is decorated with jewels and shows a resemblance to the domed structure of the Qubbat al-Sakhrah (Figure 22).

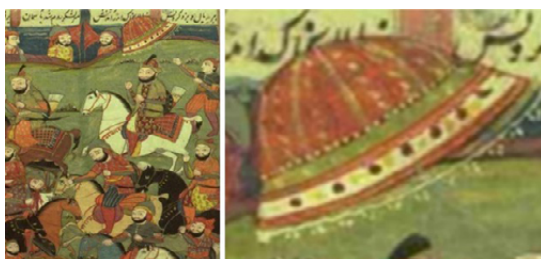


Figure 20 Alexander's war, *Shahnameh* (16th century).

Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran collection, No. 5-17807, f. 335v.

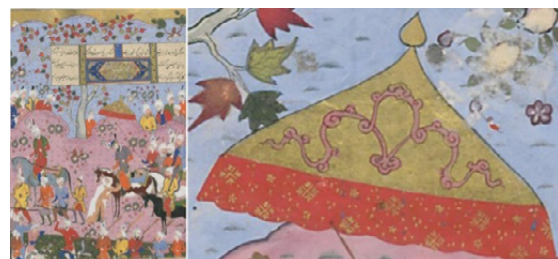


Figure 21 Sultan Sanjar and the old woman, *The Khamsa of Nizami* (1502–1524).

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, III. Ahmed 3559, f. 20r.



Figure 22 Mughal ruler Aurangzeb, Album (18th century).

Source: Oxford, Bodleian Library collection, Ouseley Add. 170, f. 13v.



Figure 23 Shah Tahmasp, Album (1564–1565).

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, H. 2161, f. 3v.

Undoubtedly the most splendid example of a chatr, both in form and decoration, is found in the album prepared for Shah Tahmasp (Uluç 2006, 75), now housed in Topkapi Palace (Figure 23). If examined closely, it may be inferred that gemstones were used extensively in the alem of the dome-shaped chatr. Domed chatrs with pulleys of this kind were common in Bukhara and Samarkand. Among the chatrs analysed, this is the only example bearing an inscription. In the album dated 1564–1565, prepared by Emir Gaib Bey for the Safavid ruler Shah Tahmasp (Uluç 2006, 75), there appears a two-line Persian couplet:

Hayr ber- ser erçi dâri ey şeh- i mulk- i cihân
Nûr- i hûrşîdest ez hayr-i tû der zemîn revân

The couplet, meaning “O sovereign of the realm of beauty, although thoughts of ‘hayir’ (charity) occupy your mind, the light of the sun continues to illuminate the earth through your benevolence,” reinforces the interpretation of the chatr in relation to the sun.

Chatr Examples According to Their Decorations

Produced from precious fabrics such as atlas, silk or gold brocade (Merçil 2007, 106), chatrs were generally richly decorated, with the exception of a few examples featuring only simple linear ornamentation. The chatrs in the Museum of Turkish-Islamic Art (Figure 17) and the British Library (Figure 18) draw attention with their simplicity. When the analysed chatr depictions are classified based on their decorative elements, four primary motif groups emerge: hatayi-style floral motifs, rumi motifs, cloud motifs, and mythical animal motifs.

The hatayi motif group consists of ornamentation of vegetal origin, whose source is generally accepted to be East Turkestan, also known as Hita, Hitay and Hoten, where the Uyghur Turks live (Doğanay and Akyüz 2024, 56–58). An analysis of the chatrs decorated in the hatayi style reveals two distinct applications. In the 1882-dated *Akbarnama* (Figure 24), the chatr example (Râd 2011, 399) is entirely ornamented with hatayi motifs. In the 16th century AD, *muraqqa* on the



Figure 24 Hatayi-style motif example, *History of Akbar Shah in Hindi* (1882).

Source: The Golestan Palace Library collection, No. 2253.

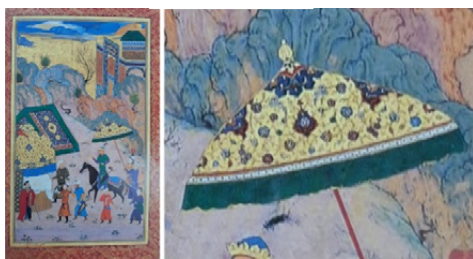


Figure 25 Hatayi-style motif example, *Muraqqa* (16th century).

Source: The Golestan Palace Library collection, No. 1663, f.43.



Figure 26 Cloud motif example, *The Khamsa of Nizami* (1488–1508).

Source: Museum of Turkish-Islamic Art collection, No. 1991, f. 84v.

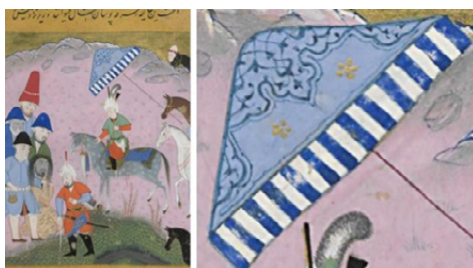


Figure 27 Rumi motif example, *Golestan* (1554).

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, H. 673, f.21v.

theme of sovereignty, mainly hatayi-style floral motifs are combined with rumi motifs in the decoration of the chatr (Figure 25) (Râd 2011, 450), and a similar application can also be observed in the chatr depicted in the album of Shah Tahmasp (Figure 22).

The cloud motif is among the most frequently used decorative elements on chatrs. Various theories exist regarding its origin. It is known that the cloud motif, which occupied an important place in Turkish art after the 15th century AD, was transmitted from Chinese culture. Believed to have developed in Chinese art, particularly within a religious context, the motif became a decorative element widely employed by the 15th-century AD Herat School and Shiraz School. Nevertheless, the cloud motif may also be interpreted as a stylisation of naturally occurring cloud forms; in essence, however, it appears more closely related to the stylisation of the dragon (Doğanay 1999, 225).

Among the examined chatr examples, the cloud motif appears both on the upper canopy and on the hem section in *The Khamsa of Nizami*, dated 1488–1508 (Figure 26) (Adibelli 2024, 349). A similar cloud motif is also employed in another copy of *The Khamsa of Nizami* (Figure 22), dated 1502–1524, as well as in the 1509 *Shahnameh*.

The rumi motif is also a type of motif frequently used in chatr covers. As an ornamental form, the term rumi is generally understood to denote a stylised vegetal motif associated with the land of Rûm (Doğanay and Akyüz 2024, 43–53). Among the chatr depictions examined in this study, examples featuring rumi motifs can be observed in copies of *Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi (Figure 12), *The Khamsa of Nizami* by Nizami Ganjavi (Figure 13), and *Golestan* by Saadi Shirazi dated 1554 (Figure 27) (Adibelli 2024, 247).

Another type of decoration used in chatr depictions is the legendary creatures in the “saz” style. Two examples belonging to this group were identified. One of these appears in a copy of *The Khamsa of Nizami* dated 1481, where two mythical birds are depicted facing one another on the chatr cover (Adibelli 2024, 258) (Figure 28). It is understood that simurg, who became known as phoenix and *zumrud u anka* after Islam, is related to Garuda and the birds of prey in Turkish mythology. In Turkish-Islamic art, the simurg is represented in two distinct ways. Firstly, the bird is a symbol of goodness and is the protector of



Figure 28 Simurg motif example in the saz style, *The Khamsa of Nizami* (1481).

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, H. 762, f. 12r.



Figure 29 Dragon motif example in the saz style, *Shahnameh* (1400).

Source: National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution collection, No. F1931.36.

heroes. Secondly, it is an evil monster. In the *Shahnameh*, the good simurg finds Zal, abandoned by his father, and raises him on Mount Qaf. The evil simurg is the monster that Isfandiyar kills by using a car full of sharp weapons (Çoruhlu 2019, 25, 29).

Another mythological creature represented on chatrs is the dragon. An example appears in a 1,400 copy of *Khusraw and Shirin* (Figure 29), where a dragon motif rendered in the “saz” style extends from the right side toward the left corner of the chatr. It is known that the dragon culture originated in China and then transferred to Islamic culture. The dragon has essentially two kinds of symbolism in Turkish culture. This symbolism is also associated with the concept of Heaven and Earth. The dragon, which symbolises the sun and the moon, is commonly depicted with fire coming out of its mouth. In Turkish mythology, instead of the fish or the turtle, the dragon is sometimes regarded as the animal that carries the world and is also considered one of the symbols that protect the tree of life. Sometimes it was also a symbol of evil or hell, as it waited for the tree of the gods of the underworld. In Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, the dragon is the subject of different stories as a symbol of valour, power and evil (Çoruhlu 2019, 55, 63, 72).

Chatr Examples According to Their Carrier

It was customary for the chatr to be carried by the chatrdar with a long spear/hilt. However, in Hindu culture, examples also exist in which the chatr was attached directly to the throne. In this practice, the chatr was sometimes fixed to the throne with a long wooden handle, as in the portrait of Akbar Shah (Figure 30), and sometimes it was placed directly on the top of the throne without a handle due to the height of the throne in a Hindu album (Figure 31).

The first people who come to mind as users of the chatr are monarchs and rulers. It is known from the sources that not only rulers but also members of the dynasty used the chatr as a sign of sovereignty with the permission of the sultan (Merçil 2007, 104). In a Hindu album preserved in the Bodleian Library, a scene depicting a gathering of numerous figures shows each individual beneath a chatr (Figure 32). The fact that the person in the centre is seated on a throne and that his chatr is slightly larger suggests that he is the ruler, while the others are important figures in the administration. This practice suggests that, at least in certain regions, the chatr was used not only by monarchs but also by high-ranking officials.



Figure 30 Chatr, Album (1602–1604).

Source: Oxford, Bodleian Library collection, MS. Ouseley Add. 173, f. 10r.



Figure 31 Chatr, Album (1650).

Source: Oxford, Bodleian Library collection, MS. Douce Or. A. 1, f. 8v.



Figure 32 Chatr, Album (1600–1799).

Source: Oxford, Bodleian Library collection, MS. Douce Or. A. 3, f.13r.

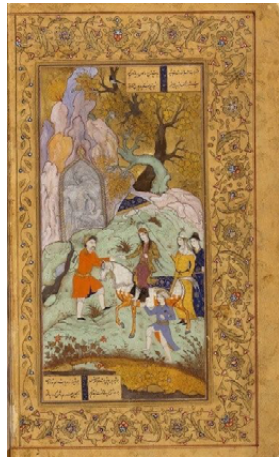


Figure 33 Shirin visiting Farhad, The Khamsa of Nizami (1560–1561).

Source: National Library of France collection, Supp. pers. 1980, f. 53v.



Figure 34 Qaysar sending an envoy to Enushirvan, *Shahnameh* (1560).

Source: Library of Congress collection, Cod. Per. 10, No. 2021667229, f. 494v.

In historical Islamic societies, the use of the chatr by women is notably absent, largely due to the sociopolitical structure in which women were generally not permitted to hold rulership positions. On the other hand, although rare, there are instances in visual art where women are depicted using the chatr. In the scene of Shirin's visit to Farhad (Figure 33) (Dursunoğlu 2016, 125), a woman holds a chatr for Shirin, who meets Farhad on a horse. Here, although she is a woman, the fact that the chatr is being held for Shirin is because she is not a Muslim but an Armenian princess. An interesting example can be seen in *Shahnameh* dated 1560 (Figure 34). While the chatr for the standing female envoy is being held by a female chatdar, probably representing her country, Enushirvan on the throne does not use a chatr. It is seen that while men always hold umbrellas for male rulers, women hold umbrellas for female rulers.

Depending on the status of the rulers, the status of the chatrs also changes. For monarchs on foot or seated on the throne, pedestrian chatrdars always served. In depictions of monarchs on horseback, both pedestrian and equestrian chatrdars are occasionally observed. In a 16th-century AD illustration of Alexander's battle (Figure 35) (Yaghoubi 2017, 156–157), the ruler is shown mounted, accompanied by pedestrian chatrdars holding the chatr. Conversely, in the scene depicting Ardashir observing a chovgan game (Figure 36), an equestrian chatrdar is portrayed holding the chatr above the mounted Ardashir.

CONCLUSION

The chatr, which was prominently featured in ancient Mesopotamian cultures, also appears in paintings as a symbol of rulership in this region and later in Hindu culture. In certain depictions, the chatr is carried by angels, suggesting a symbolic association with the Shadow of the Arch found in apocalyptic traditions. This indicates that the chatr was attributed with a sense of holiness, thereby reinforcing the sacred nature of the ruler.

Undoubtedly, the manuscript group containing the largest number of chatr depictions is the *Shahnameh*. Other important examples include manuscripts of *The Khamsa of Nizami*, the *Iskandarnameh*, and the *Golestan* manuscripts. Numerous illustrations featuring the chatr are also preserved in various albums and manuscript collections housed in libraries and museums worldwide.

In Islamic culture, the chatr was reserved exclusively for male rulers. An exceptional case may be found in depictions of Shirin, in which the chatr is also employed. Considering that the chatr was a symbol of sovereignty in the pre-Islamic period of the region, it is plausible that Shirin, as an Armenian princess, would have been portrayed with a chatr in visual representations.

In these depictions, male rulers are invariably accompanied by male chatrdars. When rulers are shown seated on thrones or standing, a chatrdar standing on foot is consistently present. In representations of rulers on horseback, however, both mounted and pedestrian chatrdars appear.

The use of the chatr as a symbol of power was not found throughout Islamic civilisation. For instance, no depictions of a chatr in the form of an umbrella have been identified in manuscripts from the Ottoman period, which ruled over three continents for a long time.



Figure 35 The battle of Alexander's, *Shahnameh* (16th century).

Source: National Library and Archives of the Islamic Republic of Iran collection, No. 5-17807, f. 335v.



Figure 36 Ardashir watching the children playing chovgan, *Shahnameh*.

Source: Topkapi Palace Museum Library collection, H. 1481, f. 407r.

The geographic distribution of manuscripts featuring chatr depictions extends from Iran to India, while their chronological distribution spans the 15th to the 17th centuries. In manuscripts produced in the Iranian cultural sphere, the chatr is typically carried by a chatrdar, either on foot or on horseback. In Indian manuscripts, however, chatrs are occasionally depicted as being affixed directly to thrones.

While some chatrs are rendered in a conical form, the dome-shaped type predominates. One of the most elaborate examples of a pointed dome-style chatr appears in the album of Shah Tahmasp, distinguished by both its inscription and the richness of its decoration. In general, depictions of chatrs display intricate decorative programmes incorporating hatayi, cloud, and rumi motifs; in certain examples, mythical creatures such as the simurgh and dragons are also represented.

Unlike the umbrella in European culture, which functioned as a status symbol among certain social classes, the chatr in Eastern traditions served as an unequivocal emblem of sovereignty. The meticulous and prominent depiction of the chatr in manuscripts and albums further underscores its significance as a visual marker of rulership.

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