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Fig. 41. on the right a part of a brozen pin in Lorestan, 1th millennium BC. A pierist holds a snake tale in one hand and a palm tree on the other hand. Snake and palm tree were the symbols of fertility in the Mesopotamia. On the left a part of Oyvig Church door in Hardanger. Norway 13th century AC. Source: Gaviri, 2006: 27.



Fig. 42. Part of entrance to the Ulvik Church in Hardanger, Norway, 13th century. Source: Yasavoli, 1992: 61.

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### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Jalalian, M. (2018). Longevity and Continuity of Ancient Persian Motifs and Symbols (Symbols of Mehr) After the Advent of Islam in the West. *journal of art & civilization of the orient* .6 (19):41-52

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22034/jaco.2018.63582>

URL: [http://www.jaco-sj.com/article\\_63582.html](http://www.jaco-sj.com/article_63582.html)





Fig.33.Ctesiphon-Tetragonal relief with the motif of peacock. (6th century). Source: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/334884922274439236/>



Fig. 34. Silky and woolen textiles, violet and yellow (4th century A.D.). Source: Moghadam, 1999: 111.



Fig. 35. Venice. A peacock which has opened its tail up. Source: Girshman, R. 1971: 308.



Fig. 36. Shining of honorable light. Oil color behind the window. Source: Fazaeli, S, 2008: 97.



Fig. 37. Anahita in the shelter of sky eagle. Hermitage museum. Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/aljashmie/sassanian-post-sassanian-art/>.



Fig. 38. An animal that is shaped by a combination of an eagle head and wings, lion body and a snake in its beak, on both sides of tree of life, above the there is a swan with open wings feeding her chicks. Source: Yasavali, 1992: 90.



Fig. 39. Entrance door frame of San Luca church. Source: Yasavali, 1992: 64.



Fig. 40. fabric and silk, light cream and white 4th century AC. Source: <http://www.ichodoc.ir/p-a/CHANGED/59/HTML/59-39.HTM>.

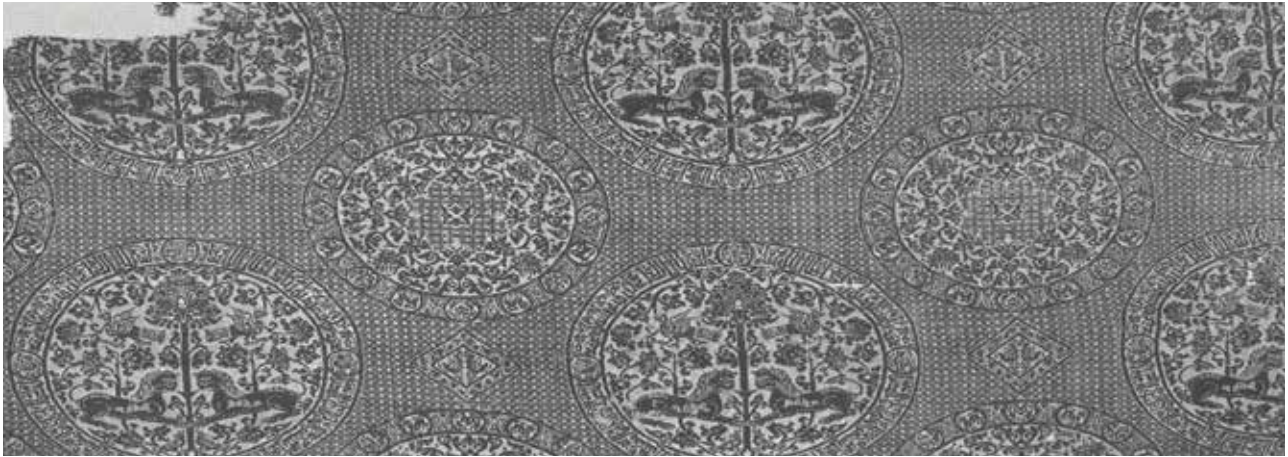


Fig. 28. Continuity of Sasanid motifs on Sasanid motifs on Sasanid textiles during Buyid dynasty. Tree of life at the middle and the motifs of lion and bird have been mirrored on the sides. Shapes of cross and rosettes in a circular frame. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 110.

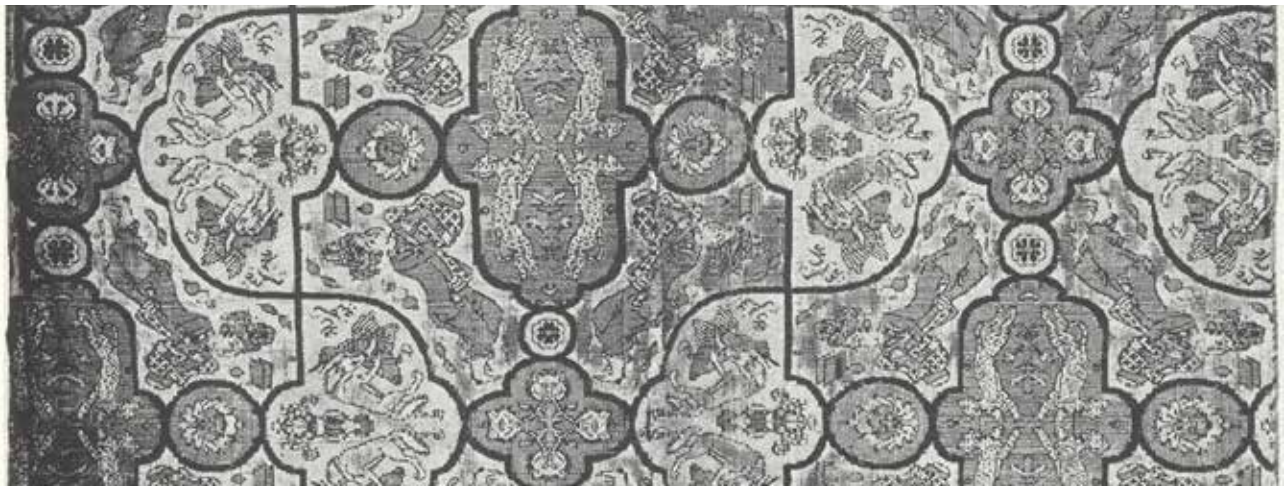


Fig. 29. Continuity of Sasanid motifs on Sasanid motifs on Sasanid textiles during Buyid dynasty. Continuity of the shining by the means of a vase, motif of a cross, shape of lion and eagle, head of lion, and a man. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 202.



Fig. 30. Wooden epigraph of a carved tree (Vatican Loggias). Source: Yasavoli, 1992: 91.



Fig. 31. A jug with the motif of a tree of life and lions that are placed cross-shaped. (6th century A.D.) Source: Girshman, R. 1971: 306.



Fig. 32. Motif of saint Mamay. Source: [http://museum.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=ENG&sec\\_id=216&info\\_id=12439](http://museum.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=216&info_id=12439)

periodic and mortal life process of the creatures (Moghaddam, 2009: 26). Eagle is a royal bird and also a sign of a Mehr ;the divine grandeur. It also reminds the cross when it opens its wings.

- In a carving on a metal that dates back to the late Sassanid period ,the image of Anahita protected by the eagle is seen ,with two smaller men on both sides, one with a bow and arrow in his hands and the other with an ax ,all of which are symbols of Mehr (Fig. 37).

- On the carving of a wooden door in Logias Vatican in Rome, the tree of life and two winged animals with eagle heads are seen having snakes in their mouths. On top of the tree, a bird (swan) is feeding the cygnets with open wings (Fig. 38).

- On the wooden door frame of Lucca Cathedral, an eagle is seen with a sheep in its claws (Fig. 39).

The two-headed eagles are repetitively seen in the woven fabric of Al-Boyah (Fig. 40). This motif looks enormous due to the abstraction of its elements. The horns of the antelope on the bird's head and the figure of the winged king on its chest represents the durability of ancient imagery metaphors (Pope, 2009: 38).The relation of the snake with femininity, especially the mother goddess, originates from the periodic and close to the floor movement of the snake. Additionally, the rebirth of the snake through molting is linked to the moon transformations. The snake is the symbol of water creating forces directed by the moon. The snake as a vital force is both creator and a terminator (Moghaddam, 2009: 23).

- The snake and the palm in Mesopotamia have been the signs of fertility. On a bronze pinsetter in Lorestan, a cleric is seen, with a snake tail in one hand, and a palm branch in the other hand (Fig.41). In the scenes that Mehr sacrifices a cow, there is a snake that wants to drink from the cow blood.

- On the entrance door of Church in Norway, dating back to the thirteenth century, a snake is seen on the impenetrable branches of a tree in which the lily (the flower of Anahita) and the wing motifs are also observed (Fig. 42).

## Conclusion

In the ancient Persian art ,emphasis on beauty and ornamental style has led to the grandeur and completion of many motifs and designs. The reason and ration in Persian minds, the association of the subjects to life ,the acceptance of imagination, and the glory and pervasiveness of Persian art during Sassanid period ,led to the development and durability of this art in in Iran and other territories. As Girshman believes ,the art of the medieval European empire was long influenced by the Sassanid art. Regarding the discussed motifs and symbols, the followings reasons can be suggested as the main reasons for longevity and durability of ancient Persian art:

1. The beliefs, rituals and customs that have been preserved in the minds and collective memory of people for decades in written or oral forms ,did not change or disappear simply .Later ,Persian artists began to use many of these motifs and symbols consciously or unconsciously. These motifs continued with regard to their symbolic meaning or with the change of meaning in the arts of other territories.

2. Some symbols and designs can be adapted and integrated into other rituals. They could have been used with a slight change of meaning or content. They have lasted since they were not in contrast with new rituals.

3. The beauty and completeness of some ornamental designs ,as well as their stylized and geometric shapes in which Persians excelled, led to their durability and pervasiveness.

4. The imitation of some motifs and scenes with a little manipulation or innovations.

5. The prevalence of Mazdeism and Mehr beliefs and the domination of the Islamic religion and Islamic governments over vast territories. led to spread of Persian art beyond borders.



Fig. 18. Lotus relief from Tachar palace, reserved in the United States of America, Orientalism museum of Chicago. Source: Mohammadpanah, B. 2006: 90.



Fig. 19. The born of Mehr, from the Lotous, France, Source: Moghadam, 1999: 112.



Fig. 20. The memorial lotus at the Constantine church of Vatican footsteps. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 113.



Fig. 21. A cock with halo, 6th-7th ACm Vatican. Source: Girshman, R.1971: 21.



Fig. 22. Pottery tank, 7th millennium AC .Source: Qa'ini, 2004: 49.



Fig. 23. A bowl with the enamel glaze, 5th century AC. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 98.



Fig. 24. Nahid riding a lion motif carved on a Kooshian stamp. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 167.



Fig. 25. Mehr riding a lion, from Jeliub in Egypt: Source: Moghadam, 1999: 163.



Fig.26. On the left: Shinon- sewn cloth of Fatimid era: Saint- Maxim cassock. (10th century A.D.). Source: Girshman, R. 1971: 313.



Fig.27. Tir- A lion which has a motif of Sasanid star on its rump. Source: Girshman, R. 1971: 307.



Fig. 11. Pearl at the tip of the pigeon and two dolphins on the coffin from the tomb of Atropos. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 111.



Fig.12. Tisfun, two molding decorating reliefs from the Sassanid era, Berlin museum. Source: [http://tamadonema.ir/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/641px-MIK\\_-\\_Sassaniden\\_Pahlavi-Monogramm.jpg](http://tamadonema.ir/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/641px-MIK_-_Sassaniden_Pahlavi-Monogramm.jpg)



the university of Tehran logo was designed by Mohsen Moqaddam



Fig.13. Istanbul, peacock (10th- 11th AC) Louvre. Source: Girshman, R. 1971: 308.



Fig.14. The statue of Nahid and her son riding a dolphin from Espani. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 105.



Fig.15. The remained parts of a stone canal that was used for the Pasargad famous gardens irrigation. Source Mohammadpanah, B. 2006: 54.



Fig.16. a part of golden scabbard of Melangof sword. Source: Behzadi, R. 2003: 153.



Fig.17. Stemware pottery bowl 4th millennium AC. Source: Qa'ini, 2004: 45.



Fig.5. On the right: Mary breast feeding (7th millennium AC) on the left “Nardista – the holy face of Jesus in Espas Nardista (12th millennium AC). Source: Girshman, R. 1971: 296.

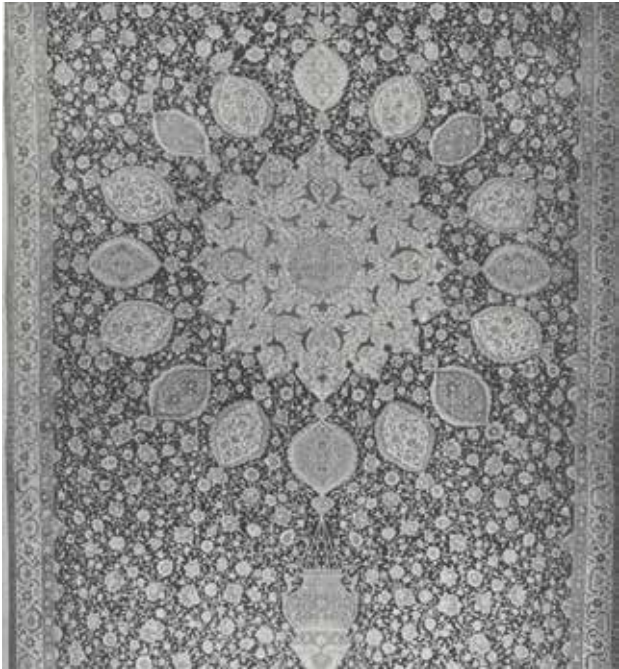


Fig.6. Toranj carpet known as Ardabil carpet (1561 AC) with the phrase of created by Maqsd Kashani. Pope, A.U. 1959: 194.



Fig.7. testaceous Mehras, from a mihrab in Hungary. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 161.

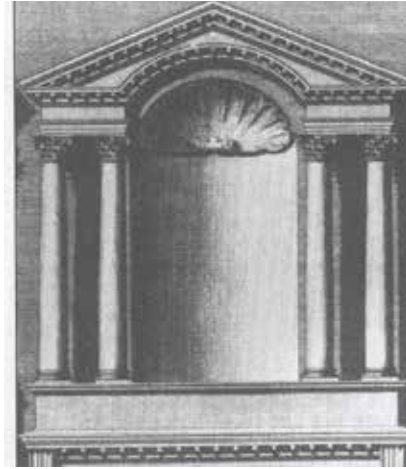


Fig.8. An arch above the MEHRA Bel’abak door. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 155.



Fig.9. Dolphin, oyster and the cross. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 106.



Fig.10. Pearl string on the tip of Domar, a motif on Darbaman. Afghanistan. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 110.



Fig.1. Nahid and her son Statue of Dieburg Mihrab, Germany. Source: Gaviri, 2006: 81.

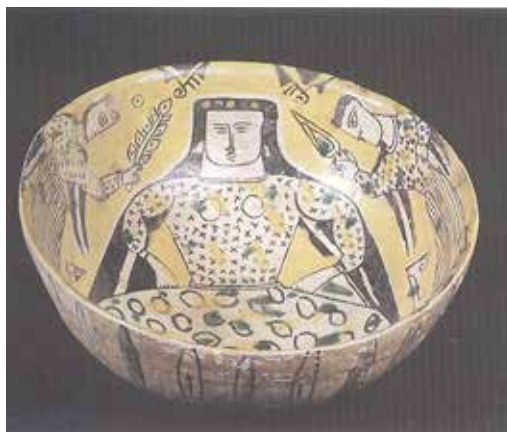


Fig.2. Stemware pottery bowl 4th millennium AC. Source: Qa'ini, 2004: 46.



Fig.3. Nahid and his son Mehr statue, Dieburg, Germany. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 116.



Fig. 4. god's mother. Source: Moghadam, 1999: 108.

peacock open tail resembles the sun wheel .Peacock is a symbol of beauty, power and immortality(Fazaeli, 2008:95). It is considered a sign of Mehr because it represents a starry sky.

- The peacock in ancient Persian motifs, especially during the Sassanid period (Fig.33).

- In a silk woven fabric that dates back to Al-Boyah era, the peacocks that symbolize a starry sky are depicted in form of rhombus that allude to moon with hunted creatures in their claws to reveal their power and privilege (Pope, 2009 :38) (Fig.34).

- Peacock is originally a wonder of Persian paradise, and the Romans recognize it as the immortality source for sky. The Christians regard it as a sign of the resurrection of Christ that has been widely used in masonry and Byzantine paintings themes, such as the marble tablet in Saint Mark Church in Venice (Girshman, 1895: 308 ); (Fig .35).

- The glass paintings depicting the ascension of the Messenger of Islam on a glint on which two wings are spread. It has a face of a crowned man and a tail of a peacock around which the angles are flying (Fazaeli, 2008: 93); (Fig.36).

### **Eagle-snake( Dragon)**

In the ancient art, the eagle symbolizes the sun and the snake symbolizes the moon. The battle between the snake and the eagle offers a



in the gift box that they give to the king (Moghaddam, 2009: 45).

- In Taq-e Bostan, the Mehr figure stands on a lotus flower.
- In the stone carvings of Tachar palace, the lotus flowers are seen (Fig.18).
- The statue found in sanctuary is created showing the birth of Mehr from a lotus flower (Fig.19).
- In the stone motif, the lotus buds look similar to pine fruits. There exists a fountain in Vatican ,which was formerly placed a Mehr temple and poured water into a lotus shaped basin(Fig.20); (Moghaddam, 2009: 46).
- The stylized and natural lotus flowers were later used more often.

### Rooster

The Aryans used to sanctify the rooster, horse, and cow. The rooster helped the Soroush god to awaken Fardisnan and announce the sun rise by singing (Joniedi, 2010: 769).In the fifth century, when the inhabitants of southern Russia began to worship the sun, the sun symbols such as the rooster and the horse gained importance in their art. The rooster symbol in Islamic art has remained more intact showing its significance up to the new century (Talbot, 180: 70).While the symbolism of the infidels was severely eradicated by Christian clerics, some abstract and geometric patterns maintained their original name, such as the rooster, goat, and antler (Talbot ,1990: 70).

- The silk fabric in the Lateran's treasure has a pattern of geometric lines and it may be one of the gifts sent to Pope III. On a yellow golden background, it appears a rooster in a circle with a halo around its head (Girshman, 1991: 230); (Fig.21).
- The rooster figure is still witnessed on post-Islamic Persian pottery (Fig. 22 & 23).

### Lion

Lion is a symbol of the sun, power and justice and implies the physical and spiritual powers. The lion is ridden by many gods and goddesses, and the rider and the lion are observed in an identification process (Fazaeli ,2008: 150).

Anahita and Mehr have also been depicted riding a lion (Fig. 24 & 25). The lion indicates the return to the sun which requires the resurgence of cosmic forces (Fazaeli, 2008: 150).The battle of lion with horned animals (cows, goats) could imply the same meaning and changing of seasons .In this belief, every sacrificed thing will ascend to a higher level. The lion figure has been used since the early ages of ancient Persian art, either separately, or in the form of a group of animals standing next to a fireplace or the tree of life, or in attacking scenes.

These motifs are also printed on Sassanid fabrics and they have been imitated by many.

- The Persian art is clearly imitated on a silk fabric preserved in the Notre Dame de la Couture Church in France. Two green-colored lions are depicted on a red-colored background standing opposite each other and on the sides of a fireplace ,and two stars on two wheels are seen on their laps (Girshman ,1951: 313); (Fig .27).

On the woven fabric of the Al-Boyah era ,ancient motifs are seen repetitively.

- Comparable Sassanid motifs seen on potteries are observed on Sassanid fabrics as well. During the Al-Boyah era, although Islam banned the depiction of animal and human figures on art crafts, silk woven fabrics designs with similar Sassanid motifs, especially animal motifs are abundant .The Persians have frequently referred to analogies and ancient Persian beliefs in the Sufism ,and they have recorded art crafts that indicate the Mazdarism during the fourth and fifth centuries (Pope, 1998: 38); (Fig. 28 & 29).A carving on a wooden door that is ornamented with a frame of pearls (Fig. 30).
- On a jar dating back to the 6th and 7th centuries, preserved in the National Library of Paris, the tree of life and two lions shaping a cross with sun-shaped flowers on their shoulders are carved (Fig.31).
- The Saint Mama from Gelati of Georgia, riding on a lion, 11th AD, Georgian National Museum (Fig 32).

### Peacock

The peacock symbolizes the sun, since the

depicted in Sassanid style (Girshman, 1991: 29); (Fig. 5). Since the down to chin faces are imitated, it is likely that the breastfeeding image is also an imitation of Anahita and Mehr.

• In areas where illustration of image was not possible, on carpets for instance, ancient symbols and signs are still observed. In a Toranj carpet of Tabriz known as Ardebil carpet, which dates back to 940 AH, the same ancient symbols that refer to the sun and the moon are witnessed. The design of this carpet coincides in congruency with the oldest Persian ideas and beliefs, since the sun was associated with the hidden sky sea from which the rain, the fog and other elements that affect the fertility of the earth are created. In the heart of the Toranj in the center of the carpet, a small green pond with floating lotuses is seen.

(Pope, 1959: 38); (Fig. 6). It should be noted that our poets have mentioned the green color and the moon. Everyone who is jeweled with peridot, is accompanied by the affection of Prophet (mohammad Nezami).

### Pearls and shells

The similarity of the impregnation of a goddess in the water (Anahita, washed her hair in a lake and she was with child) and the fertilization of the shells in the sea is meaningful for the followers of Mehr.

• The emergence of Mehr from a shell is seen in a Mehr temple in England's "Chapel Hill" in which the shell is depicted in the sea (Moghaddam, 2009: 40).

• In Mehr temples, the stone that was put for washing the entrance door was carved as a shell; alike a stone on a Mehr temple in Hungary (Fig. 7). This custom has been followed later in the entrances of churches and mosques.

• The arches of Mehr temples is shaped like shells, as seen on the top of a Mehr temple in Baalbek (Moghaddam, 2009: 42); (Fig. 8).

Alike the followers of Mehr, the Christians use the symbol of dolphins and shell in religious motifs, which is not related to Jesus (Fig. 9).

• On top of Taq-e Bostan two winged angels are seen, one of them has a pearl tiara and the other has a pearl bowl. In Mehr memorials, the shape of

pearls are observed in the beaks of one or two birds, similar to the motif depicted on Bamiyan wall of Afghanistan (Fig. 10); (or the dolphin motif in a tomb in); (Fig. 11). Pearl ornamentation was very common in Sassanid era; especially in decorative glued gypsum pieces of squares, in which a pearl-shaped circle is carved. One of these circles is adorned by a pair of wings, and placed on top of a short Pahlavi script (Fig. 12); (Girshman, 1951: 189). Currently, it is the logo of University of Tehran.

Some of the Sassanid artistic subjects came from Byzantine Empire through the powerful Islamic currents from the 9th to 11th centuries. Covered walls with glazed tiles, which are found around Constantinople and now held in the Louvre, show a peacock that has a pearl necklace and a plant branch in the beak (Fig. 13); (Girshman, 1951: 308).

### Dolphin and fish

After the pearls and shell, dolphins that live in water and feed their children are the finest symbols for the followers of Mehr. There is a statue of Nahid and her son Mehr riding a dolphin in museum (Fig. 14); (Moghaddam, 2009: 45). In eastern Iran where Mehr temples are abundant, the dolphin figure is repetitively seen. As aforementioned, dolphins and shells are used in numerous ancient churches (Fig. 8).

Fish are also seen in many ancient motifs. On the stone carvings of Cyrus's palace, the cow and fish figures are seen together (Fig. 15). In Scythian art, the figure of a winged lion with a bow in the hands is also seen, in which a fish is used instead of the wings (Fig. 16). In post-Islamic Persian pottery, the fish figure is observed as well (Fig. 17).

• Mehr rode a dolphin in his childhood, and he was depicted riding a panther shaped lion in his youth. This tradition still remains in portraying Dervish hubs. A figure of a "woman fish" form is transferred from Lorestan to the gate of Moissac church, and to Le Grand Notre Dame church in Poitiers city (Girshman, 1959: 303). Lotus The plant that holds Sushians grandeur in the lake is the Lotus. The relation of Mehr with lotus is described in Mehrgan celebration when the chief cleric puts a lotus

human perception. The artist should discover a language for expressing emotions, not only for creating cognitive motifs that reveal the meanings related to life, but also for expressing the thoughts that lie in these influential motifs their thoughts in terms of expression that has a certain effect of its own. Accordingly the ancient artists invented certain signs and motifs which were extremely and clearly influential.

It may not be incorrect to consider the Persian art as “the art of absolute motif”, a type of art that should be regarded just like music and architecture. After the Arab invasion to Iran, the Persian artists were inevitably recruited since the Arabs did not have any artistic background or a specific artistic style. The Persians used the same material and subjects to achieve new innovations and the results were completely created by Persians. This feature of the ancient Persian art led to its pervasiveness and continuation in Iran and other lands (Pope, 1959). However, Persian art was spread through Mani, Fardayi and Mehr rituals beyond Persian borders before the advent of Islam and the Arab conquerors.

### Hypothesis

The lonevity of some ancient and ritual Persian designs, motifs, and symbols especially in other lands can be attributed to some other reasons that need further elucidation and research since the beliefs that justified these rituals have vanished.

The study of ancient symbols during and after the ancient times. Continuity of life and fertility were the main concerns of all human beings in ancient times, which was especially intertwined with Persian ancient life style. Worshipping Anahita and Mehr was communal before and after the advent of Zarathustra. The ancient symbols can generally be divided into two groups:

1. Symbols that refer to the moon, water and Anahita, such as: Horned animals (goat, ram, deer cow) Long-legged aquatic birds, birds and swan, dolphin, fish, lotus, pots and dishes, snake and dragon, square, rhombus, and the green color...

2. Symbols that refer to the sun, fire and Mehr, such as: Great cats lion, tiger, leopard, (rooster,

peacock, fast birds) eagle, hawk, crow, circle, and the red color. Water and fire, day and night, summer and winter, life and death, and, in general, all the contrasting features truly shape the two aspects of a single and higher truth. Although they appear to be in constant contrast and conflict, they help each other to realize a single goal that is a continuation. The symbols of Anahita and Mehr are also in compliance with this rule and their contrasting powers are sometimes depicted in ancient motifs the battle between the snake and the scorpion, (while their cooperation are depicted in some others) co-operation of the moon and sun in creation of rain. (Here, some of the ancient symbols and artifacts, and their continuation in the next periods are discussed in the following).

### The goddess of fertility -the mother goddess

Anahita is the goddess of water and the goddess of fertility. A magnificent image of Nahid while breastfeeding (2-3 B.C.) in clay, Susa (Fig. 1).

Emphasizing the goddesses ‘breasts and bellies to imply fertility was very common. Many fertile goddesses are depicted in this way. In the post-Islamic period in Iran, although the human figures especially feminine figures were not favorable, some examples of the ancient trends are observed. In a fourteenth century A.H. pottery, a woman’s figure is seen having long exaggerated hair and breasts that are depicted as two circles on her dress. On her both sides, two little men are bent with respect, holding a plant and a bowl in their hands (Fig. 2). There are figurative statues of Nahid holding and breastfeeding her child, Mehr, on her knees (Fig. 3); This representation of the mother and son is an example of Mary and Jesus depiction in religious Christian arts, such as in Istanbul, with Nahid’s shell on top and the two symbols of the moon and the sun in the two upper corners of the scene (Moghaddam, 2009: 55); (Fig. 4).

• In a wall painting of the Monastery of “Saint-Germain” in Saqrah, 7th AD, the image of Mary breastfeeding Jesus is observed in an arch, along with a row of human faces in a “down to chin” position that show the thousand-year lonevity of the Sialk Mask, along with a half-leaf date Zenith

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

حضور نمادهای باستانی ایران (نمادهای مهری-میتراپی) در فرهنگ و هنر غرب و تداوم پایداری آن در دوران اسلامی  
is also published in this issue of journal.

# Longevity and Continuity of Ancient Persian Motifs and Symbols (Symbols of Mehr) After the Advent of Islam in the West

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Received: 2018/03/04

revised: 2018/03/13

accepted: 2018/04/06

available online: 2018/06/21

## Abstract

Accentuation of beauty, stylization and transformation of motifs to geometric shapes, creation of a close link to life, continuity of various types of arts, and creating artistic ornamental style can be regarded as the features of ancient Persian art. The Persian ornamental style of art had been highly influential and clear during various epochs of time so that, it can be entitled as “the art of absolute motif”, a timeless and placeless art, alike music and architecture. The Persian art was at its peak of success during Sassanid era. The successful conquests, commercial and political relations, and worshipping Mehr beyond the Persian borders to Europe all contributed to pervasiveness of Persian art influencing many countries. Recruitment of Persian artists by the Arabs after the advent of Islam and the prevalence of this religion in many territories, accelerated the transfer of Persian art to these areas. The forms and symbols of Persian ancient art have been either merged and adopted, or modified and imitated.

**Keywords:** *Ornamentation, Symbol, Mehr worship, Continuity of symbols.*

## Introduction

Clarity and explicitly are the main principles of Persian art. The god of Iran, Ahura Mazda, was the god of light, and the Persians avoided darkness and ambiguity. The Persian thoughts were extremely rational and logical in which the fantasies were also colorful and acceptable. The specialty of Persian art is to be in close relationship and continuity with life and a variety of other arts. The Persians used to highlight beauty since historic eras.

The Persians were never satisfied with imitating

nature and the presenting real affairs. Their taste in illustration of forms was originated from their tendency to be timeless and placeless offering an immortal journey to the eternity. The Persian art owes its grandeur and spirituality to the perfection manifested in absolute ornamentations. These ornamentations have profound meanings in Persian art rather than affording mere enjoyment or mental entertainment for the addresses. Each motif and shape is a mediator for worshipping and acquiring tranquility and inner strength. In order to influence the minds of people, these colorful motifs had to be adapted to the basic manifestation of



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