

the god of sun, Atis the god of plants, Maduk the great god of Babel was accepted widely among the Persian ancient people.

The pattern is an artistic language without any written language hence its understanding is time consuming and expensive yet very useful. As it was mentioned earlier the Mahi pattern that has been used in the north west part of Iran carpets is related to Mithraism as the beliefs of Orumiyeh lake people. The application of Bird's head motifs specially in the Eastern part of Iran and Baluchistan province (Zoroaster place of bird) also proves the impact of Mithraism beliefs in the people of these lands. It might be difficult to believe but the elders' narrations, folklores, the scholars research and the visual evidences all confirm the impact of Mithraism on the Persian carpet patterns (Fig.12).

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**Bird’s head motif**

In Sistan and Baluchistan province of Iran there is motif widely used so called the Bird’s head motif. It has been used either as real or abstract form. It signifies blessing and praying for rain. The head of bird have been drawn with a horn, eyes or both. The similarity between this motif and Mithras stands on the description of Mithras as a goddess with thousands



Fig. 9. Salor Gol, Turkomen rug. Source: Tsareva, 2016: 33.



Fig. 10. A sample of a rug selected from Taher Sabahi’s collection. Source: Sabahi, 2016: 92.



Fig. 11. Mithras has thousands of eyes, detail of a slat bag. Source: Opie, 1992: 41.

of eyes and ears. Considering the province as the place of birth of Zoroaster, it conceptually connects the two (Fig. 11).

**Protecting the tree of life**

Protecting the tree of life is a very common theme in artistic works around the world. It is the symbol universe and human being that needs to be protected to survive. It has been protected by animal or floral symbols. Horse is one of the signs associated with the Mithras and it is narrated that possibly it was sacrificed in Mithraism rituals for the sake of Mithras (Doshengimen, 2006, 240). The tree of life with its protectors can be found in the Persian carpet too. The white horse also have been known as the symbol of Rain or Tishtar and after Sasanid era as a soul similar to a bird (Razi, 2005: 238).



Fig.12. Kerman Rug, 16th Rug Exhibition. Photo: author.

**Conclusion**

Today the collaborative and multidisciplinary research is very popular internationally. There is no science that is not connected to the world of Art, like a highway. In order to understand the history of human being, the art history must be taken into account. Distancing from the historical roots the national identity of a nation might be faded. Mithras the Persian goddess stand by the Shams

pattern with similar to lotus such as flaming halo, palm leaves and pomegranate flower reminding Mithraism symbolism. Shah Abbasi flower is a pattern with a great history formal alteration with the fixed concepts keeps alive the history of Persia (Fig.8).

### Salor Gol

Turkmen carpets mostly can be recognized of the others by their repeated large and small flowers. Some of these flowers have been used on the camel decoration materials on the wedding ceremonies. In one of Turkmen design with a large flower with two or three rosette, each consists of a Seljuk eight folio start with the cutting edges. This Seljuk star has been made of square symbolizing the earth, a lozenge signifying the universe with four arches around it. Like the other carpet with large circle flower this carpet also reflects the paradise. Arches recalls 4 gates of the universe with their protectors.

The gates to the eternity world have been open in the past will be in the future. It shows the cultural beliefs of Turkmen people and presentation of their identity trough patterns and images. The gate is a sign of passing from moral world to the immoral and from the body to the soul. The protectors not only help people in achieving morality. The gate also interpreted as the combination of soul and body, the heart of universe (Tsareva, 2016: 30).

The similarities between this and the Chinese golden flower is also important to discuss. An eternal flower, a light that returns to its origin (Richard, 1992: 39). The trace of Mithras here turns back to the Turkmen tribe beliefs. Believing in the sun have been popular among them. The impact of Mithraism could be found in these people's belief in the soul and horse (Eliade, 2013: 291), seventh traveling stages of the soul to underground realms (ibid, 316) and mythological similarities of Shaman and Mehr (ibid, 678); (Fig.9).



Figs. 6 & 7. Baluchi rug of Khorasan with Duskumi design in the border and inner field. Source: Boucher, 1996, 35. Duskumi glass. Tajrish Bazar. Photo: Nazila daryaie..



Fig. 8. Ornak (rug cartoon) with Mahi design, Afshar tribe of North West of Iran. Photo: Hossein Ghorbani.

### Cypress

Cypress is one of the most common motifs in the different Persian carpet. It also has been used as a sacred symbol in Moharram ceremonies (Shoaa, 2013, 294). Cypress is one of Mithraism symbols and the reminder of Syavaspa. It also has been used as a symbol of immortality in carpets, for example the carpets that have been used in Shah Abbas tomb. The palm tree signifies the tree of life in Baluchistan, as date is very important to their economy and diet (Janebolahi, 1993: 70).

### Snake

According to Mithraism myths snake and scorpion are devilish animal that get close to the cow in order to suck his blood. Some other knows them as sign of the earth and giving birth (Shah Hosseini, 1969: 22). Keeping snake teeth or skin have been told to eject the devil eye (Donaldson, 2015: 170). The snake motifs can be found on On Turkmen and Caucasus carpets borders or the main parts of carpet or both. Image 10 shows a part of and old carpet with snakes around the tree of life (Fig. 10).



Figs. 1 & 2. from the left to the right: Pazyryk and Sassanid carpet with lion patterns. Source: Pope, 2011, introduction-30/15.

Mithras. The pattern also could be found on Lori carpets with lion signs. A circle sign (Merry go round pattern in Persian carpet patterns) that could be found in Kashan carpets can symbolizes date and destiny (Boil, 2006: 98). It may also symbolizes the Zodiac (ibid: 103). The chariot of Mithras also is one of the most famous symbols of the earth planet circling the sun while creating day and night. (ibid, 98, footnote, Saghebfar). The other meaning associate with this sign is mirroring of unifying the people of all around the world (Yektaie, 1970: 96); (Figs.3-5).

### Duskumi

One of the other signs that have been used widely in Persian carpet specially in Khorasan Azerbaijan and Baluchestan Province is Duskumi. It mostly comes in the carpet borders. It symbolizes the wine glass that follower is allowed to drink after passing seven stages of Mithraism successfully. This ceremony of Drinking or Haoma was held with a specific ritual (Razi, 2002, 2402:4). It is said that Duskumi or Greek glass has a functional connection to what to call today sacred lavers (Doshen 2006: 241). I was also used as a fire torch or keeping the sap of Haoma plant (ibid: 2360-4). During Mopharm 2011 a religious exhibition was held in Tajrish Bazar of Tehran. Duskumi glasses were shown to be used by Iranian Muslim for taking ablution. The abstract form of this glass could be found in Baluchi carpet surrounded with leafs (Figs.6 &7).

### Shah Abbasi flower and Mahi pattern

The Shah Abbasi flower that is related to waterlily



Figs. 3- 4- 5. from the left to the right: silver water parting from seventh century BC, Kalmakareh cave. Source: Pope, 2011: 15/18.

The rug of Kashan, contemporary, chariot or meander and bar design. Photo :Nazila daryaie.

Lori rug with sun design at lion back, refer. Opie, 1998: 37.

or Lotus in roots have been used in various forme and name in the Persian carpet. Shah Abbasi is one of the most famous among the Persian carpet patterns. The flower in a Mithraism myth reveals as the mother of Mithras out of Hamoon lake (Razi, 2005: 168). Mithras was surrounded her mother (Shah Abbasi Flower) as two or four leaves, a fish or a bird. This is the most popular myth about Mithras in the Persian carpet that is still alive in the people's mind. Mahi pattern and Shah Abbasi flower can be found abundantly in Afshan carpets with different colors and sizes all around Iran. Delving into the meaning of Shah Abbasi flower lead us to Haoma or Barsam, the sacred Zoroastrian that since Achae-menid era have been presented in art works variously. Some believe the development and spread of Shah Abbasi pattern is owed to Safavid era and specially Shah Abbas the great's policy and artistic talent. Hence the presentation of a Mithraism mysterious sign remained in the Persian carpet. There are some other motifs that derived from this

Discovering a number of small basins and dishes in Susa is an evidence to this claim. At least one of these dishes is decorated with the pattern of goat-fish and a fringed rope which symbolizes the water stream (ibid: 61). In addition the Elamite people used to held sacrificial rituals twice a year. In the festival of citadel lady that one held on the first day of autumn according to Persian calendar they used to scarify a number of sheep (ibid: 55). In spite the great number of rituals why very little is known about them? The answer might be found in the mysterious nature of such rituals and the emphasize on keeping them secret among the followers.

### **Mithras and his symbolic designs**

It has been claimed the history of Mithras in Iran goes back to sixth millennium BC while the remained documents assert it dates back to second millennium BC when societies of Medes, Pars, Part and some others were scattered in Iran borders. The western scholars specially in Greek and Rome have claimed that the history of Mithras in Iran just goes back to 136 AC that it is totally biased. Affected by Neo Plato thought and religious wisdom the Greek Mithra was accepted in Rome on one hundred AC (Britannica, 1993: 8-197-b3). Similar to Iranian the believers in Greek were loyal to their Roman Mithras. The great acceptance of Mithras out of Iran boundaries and even its effect on Christianity, canonizes its popularity and generalization inside Iran. Accordingly despite of the lack of documents it seems if not all the Mithras has been approved by the majority of Iranian.

During Achaemenid dynasty in the first millennium BC, there were more than 40 tribes living in Iran who were worshiping Mithra, Anahita and Mazda but we can not find a detailed information about them in scholarly book. In various books Mithras has been called as the goddess of sun, friendship and vow, two of these characteristics or one (Esmailpur, 2006: 128). Mithras and Verune are described as young couples holding sun in their eyes and live in an sky with thousands of columns and doors (ibid: 80). Mithras has been called Mehr in Avesta, Sanskrit, middle Persian and Dari languages. Mitra has been described with thousand ears and eyes in Yasna (purdavoud, 2001: 133). Some of the animal

that symbolizes Mithras are horse, fish, dolphin, cow, boar, scorpion, lion, snake, dog, dragon, cock, peacock, griffin, sphinx and some of the plants are water lily, lotus, palm, cedar, pomegranate, rosette, grape. Mithras have been also associated with the forth elements: wind, soil, water, fire. The patterns symbolizes the people of society beliefs, conveying different messages and remain in the history as an immoral language. Pattern convey the messages, experiences knowledge and life style from a generation to the other one through different shapes. Accordingly the current study concentrates on Persian carpets patterns to understand the reflection of belief in Mithras, as there is a mutual relationships between patterns and beliefs.

### **Inanimate symbols**

While there have been several studies conducted about the Paziryek carpet, the oldest carpet of the world that have been ever found, very little known about the possible relation of its patterns to Mithras. The majority of oriental researchers specifies the Fars province as the birth place of this carpet. It is knotted and fluffy carpet. The square pattern of the carpet (compartment design) symbolizes the four elements of life as well as sublimation, perfection as well as life and death. 8 petal flowers inside the square symbolizes the sun. similar to the carpets of Sasanid era lions with the equal size as well as distance of each other are repeated which was borrowed Achaemenid art. It emphasizes on the importance sun symbol among the ancient people (Parham, 2011: 31 of introduction: 15); (Figs. 1&2).

### **Swastika the Chariot of Mithras**

Swastika is an international sign with almost similar meaning and interpretation all over the world. It is also known as the charior of Mithras, which moves with 4 wing horses. In the treasures that were found on Ziwiye of Kurdistan province there could be found pieces with lion pattern with a sun symbolized on his feet. In addition the sun sign also could be found on the back of brozen lions that were found on Kalmakareh cave which dated back to the first millennium BC both recalls Chariot of

remained from the Sassanid era which were written on Armenian and Syriac languages reveal that they used swear to Mithra (Frye, 2006: 250). Cimmerians probably were settled in Caucasus at the middle of first millennium BC. (Diakonov, 1922: 217). Saka or Scythian people who were lived on the first millennium BC were skillful horse drivers. They used to carry their family on the carriages as a living space. When a head of family died, he, his youngest wife and horses were buried together. Gradually the horse frenum was buried instead. Some of Saka. People were settled on the place that today is called Sistan province and established Sakistan government (Esmailpur, 1998: 79). Despite of the great number information on the tribes who were settled in various parts of Iran very little known on their religious beliefs. Medes were Aryan Iranian from first millennium BC who scattered in Kurdistan, Hamadan, Azerbaijan and Rey (Farhood, 2013: 240), they caused different societies were gathered under the same and united government of Medes (Birashk, 2001, 52). The (1 sentence remained).

### Religions in the ancient Iran

For understanding the religious beliefs of ancient Iranian tribes there are two sources of information: 1. The documents 2. The remained materials. Documents can be categorized to Persian and original texts, as well as religious notes. The international documents include foreigners' travelogue and history books though they cannot be considered completely perfect (Britannica, 1993: 123-24). Reliefs, textiles, names, languages, the funeral customs, sacred stuffs as well as architecture are considered as available materials. Similar to Hindu Aryan people used to worship the natural power sources water, soil, fire, wind as well as stars (1 sentence remained).

They constructed temples and the sacrifice places in the mountains for the sake of "fire". Accordingly, the Hindu-Iranian as well as Mazda and Medes beliefs were very important before the rise of Zoroaster (Noss, 1975: 230). Some research claim that the Hindu-Iranian ancestors before getting separated from each other used to worship Mithras (Cumont, 2004: 23).

Medes of the western part of Iran had the largest territory in Azerbaijan and believed in different gods. The religion history of Medes has been effected by the Zoroastrian religion even more after seventh century (AC). Six Median tribes shaped the Magi tribe and were ruled by priest kings. While some researchers believed they were Zoroastrian the others asserts the opposite. Achaemenid period conducting religious rituals as well as keeping the fire burning were considered as their duties. It must be noted that Magi people were different of Pars people in term of religious beliefs and they have been called magus in Hebrew and Arabian languages (ibid: 133). Some of the remained heritage of Ziwiyeh and their ornamentation reveals their belief in Zoroastrian myths. On the other hand the considering the artistic works of Manna and Lori people doesn't prove their relation to Zoroastrian religion. Respecting some animals or plants also can give us a clue regarding the ancient people beliefs. For example dog was respected among Caspian and Albanian people as a Mithraism animal that was related to Vendidad in Avesta. It is also narrated that Zoroaster believed in Mithras.

It must be noted that Zoroastrian religion have been affected by Mithras. In fact it gathered the beliefs about Mithras, Anahita and other mythological gods and goddesses in creation of a new religion. The religion during Achaemenid era was the combination of beliefs in Mithras, Anahita and Ahura-mazda (the greatest god). Some studies confirm worshiping of these gods even to Arsacid era (Javadi, 2014: 34). Zoroaster sources can tell us about Iranian religion. Zoroaster was born in the East or West of Iran in 1000 BC. A great part of his book have been lost and only a few sections such as Yasna and Gathas (verses of Zoroaster) have been remained (Noss, 1975: 299-302). Elamite people who settled in the southwest of Iran believed in four (most important) gods. In addition the history reveals that they had a strong belief on wizardry and spell, women and the powers of under the ground world creatures such a snakes (Majidzadeh, 1991: 52). The Elamite has a ritual of purification that might derived of rituals related to worship of Ea, the god of water and wisdom of Sumerian.

weavers about the roots and meanings of carpet patterns is very rare a detailed literature review is essential to this research. Also it must keep in thought that Iranian or oriental gods rarely have been presented as a human. Making abstract and geometrical forms and the application of signs and symbols have been the most important attributes Persian arts from the ancient time up to know.

### **Literature review**

Many books and papers have been written, great number of conferences have been held and a number of associations have been established around the world canonizing the Mithraism. However the lack of a access the foreign documents makes the research hard to the Persian scholars. Thanks to Mr Morteza Saghebfar who translated the two proceeding books on Mithraism research conference that were held on 1975 to 1978 to Farsi. Besides the aforementioned proceedings the current study has been used over 50 research papers that have been written from 1959 onward. There are two relevant studies to the current study that takes into account the relationship between Mithraism mysteries and carpet element conducted by Dr Ali Hozuri (the fish pattern) as well as Dr Sirous Parhsm (Mihrab and Doskumi patterns). The current study makes the advantages of library research and surfing the online data and uses descriptive analysis to achieve the aims of research.

### **The Combination of Iranian people since the ancient time**

Since the ancient time the Iranians have been established various governments in different spaces and their culture have been formed and affected by each other. Accordingly the study of culture and civilization of any of these societies can not be conducted separately ignoring their mutual effects on each other (Varjavand, 2008: 24). Since third Millennium BC there have been tribes so called Brahui, Kushan and Sogdian. In addition Elamites were settled in the South and West South of Iran. These ethnic combinations were remained unchanged until the first millennium BC without (Behzadi,

2003: 31). With the migration of Elamites on the second millennium of BC those who were supposed to have Aryan roots such as Lullubian, Kasitte, Caspian, Guti, maybe with Aryan roots were settled in the different parts of Iran. Aryans were splitted into five groups and two creeds so called Hinduism and Persian. Indri (the god of flood) and Verona the (god of sky dome) were Hinduism gods (Noss, 1975: 91). The people who Medes called hem Gutis were setteled in the states that currently are called Azarbayjan and Kurdistan, where Hurrin Sheikhan similar to Anobanini at the upper side of Dialeh river was discovered.

Gutis were unified with Lullubis who were resided around Uremia Lake and the Anobanini relief from third millennium BC have been remained from them. Near the Caspian sea Kasitte people with Aryan root were lived. They are know as the ancestor of Loristan people (Varjavand, 2008: 24). Mitannis were an of Aryans who were scattered from Azerbaijan to Zagros Mountain on the second millennium BC. and were unified with Hurrian people. They who used to live on the northern mountains of Iraq worshiped to Mithras (Noss, 1975: 301). Hurrians who were emerged from Armenia mountains and were live on the second millennium BC were resided on the northern parts of Tigris and Zagros. Those who had gods for water and weather (Behzadi, 2003: 34) weren't Indo-European even though they were ruled by them. It is said that the name of Hurri government in Mesopotamia was Mitanni on the second millennium BC. As Diakonov (1992) asserts Mitanni- Hurrian people were settled on the western and northern Uremia Lake (Diakonov, 1992: 478). Caspian people were settled around the so called Caspian or Khazar lake and Gorgan province. That is why the lake also is called Caspian (Razi, 2003: 106). The other tribe was so called Hittian. In inscriptions remained of them of 1300- 1400 BC th name of Mithras could be found (Noss, 1975: 301). Urartu and Cimmerian were the other tribes who lived on the first millennium BC.

### **Urartu**

tribe were a powerful government since 900 BC to three centuries. Many documents that have been

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# Mehr Signs in Persian rugs Moifs

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## Abstract

Today we have many researchers who are interested to study on the footprint of Mithra in Iranian civilization and culture. More over direct documents also there are indirect deeds for study Mithra. Design such as silent language is full of concepts for decipherment. And there are various attitudes towards the meaning of designs. In this article we are following the trade of Mithra by rug designs in Iran. The importance of Mithraism in Iran reflects itself by numerous tribes and regions that credence Mithra. As whole believe to Mithra in Iran was pervasive But the signs of it are clearer in North West to south west of Iran. There are designs of Mithra in Iranian rugs from North east to the East of Iran too. Historical documents tell us the history of Mithra from second millennium of Chris. Till the end of rolling ancient rulers, Sassanid, Mithra was existed among people believes and the roots of it were existed till now. One of the solutions for finding the roots of Mithra is to find the ancestors believe of tribes in the form of shape and designs. Since it will be possible for designs to gather believes in itself. Also we must note to this realities that by carrying designs believe are transporting to different places and this is the one way of distributing ritual. By library surveying and field experiences the text of this article has been writing.

**Keywords:** *Mithra in rug designs, language pattern, Iranian tribes, Iranian believe.*

## Introduction

It is not surprising to see during times and in various places the human being have been concerned of rituals and religious beliefs. Starting the time the man understood the limitation of his knowledge the need for connection to the powerful forces was established in his mind. The mind knows no borders and gradually the beliefs turned to the religions. The gathering of different communities in a harmonized living closed the beliefs together and started to receive an overall acceptance. Despite of the various differences

between the people of society among different societies of Iran, but the most powerful beliefs had the chance to survive. What is considered to be a belief remains its roots in the traditions. For example the Persian carpet as one of the traditional arts embodies both shape and meaning. The geography of carpet weaving in Iran is vast and scattered. The current study aims to find a relationship between Persian carpet patterns with Mithras that is reflected in peoples' beliefs about it. There must be clarified that clarification of this relationship is not easy and there are lots of hypothesis to be considered.

Also it must be noted that as the knowledge of the



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