

Original Research Article

Oak; A Heritage, a Culture

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Abstract

In human life history, tribes and nations have considered a sacred and mythical position for natural elements such as plants for some reasons, especially religious beliefs. Therefore, the sacred plants have found their way into people's culture and art in a way that flowers, fruit, and symbolic trees have been present in the Iranian decorations and motifs for a long time ago and continue to be in the Islamic Art. In ancient Iran which was the habitat of so many plants, the oak as an ancient heritage has been so closely interwoven with the material and spiritual life of the inhabitants of Zagros, including the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. It has become the symbol of their land. Therefore, the current study aims to analyze this motif, its concept, and the importance of the oak's position from the past until now. The research method is descriptive-analytical, and the data has been gathered using bibliographic documents and field reports. The findings indicate that the use of the oak motif, beyond its decorative aspects, has had a symbolic and religious application and is interwoven with the culture of Zagros' inhabitants so much that it has affected their culture, livelihood, customs, and oral literature. In other words, it is rooted in the mythical-ritual beliefs of this land. The symbols are related to sturdiness, uprightness, stability, and victory.

Keywords: *Plant, Motif, Oak nut, The sacred, Myth.*

Introduction

The plant element has always played a fundamental role in the people's myths and constituted a major part of those myths. This has been done in a way that the role and function of sacred and blessed trees and plants can be identified in many mythical foundations and archetypes, rituals, beliefs, ceremonies, and even folk tales and parables (Koch, 1997, 206). Besides the ancient cultural and ritual background of Iran and

the extensive use of different types of plants in the food and medical systems of the Iranian, the climatic diversity has led them to consider a special value for the plants (Pope, 2014, 32). The oak grows in Zagros Forests. Since it has a main role in ancient Iran's culture and art, as it has continued to play the same role until today, it is necessary to precisely investigate how it emerged in the Sassanid and Early Islam. The oak nut motif manifests itself in the historical works of the Sassanid era and many other civilizations, such as

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the Greek and Roman civilizations, which is a reason for its sanctity and importance. In the Sassanid Era, the motifs of sacred and mythical plants were also related to people's religious beliefs. In this regard, the aim of this study is firstly to identify the indigenous culture of the inhabitants of Zagros, which not only is rooted in ancient Iran's culture, but also is full of mythical and ritual themes, and secondly to analyze the oak motif and its origin, attitudes, and thoughts about it in the artistic works. The existence of the oak as the main element in different eras of people's lives in this region, from the past until now, necessitates the need to answer some questions such as; what has been, and is, the reason behind paying attention to the oak, its concept, and its origin and position in their daily life and art?

Hypothesis

Paying attention to the oak by the habitants of Zagros from the past until now and holding annual rituals in this region is indicative of the sanctity of this cultural-mythical heritage.

Literature review

The environmental functions of the oak tree and the benefits of using its leaves, fruit, and gum have been repeatedly noted. Among these studies, one entitled "The Oak, the Economic, Medicinal, Industrial, and Environmental Value" by Azizollah Jafari Kukhdan (2013) can be named. Shariati Rad, Sharifi, and Toghyani (2019), in an article entitled "Analysis Of Reflection Of Plant Motifs in the Rituals of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad's People," have dealt with an investigation of the role and position of oak based on the mythical and literary aspects of these rituals. Also, Mehdipoor, in an article entitled "Living Under the Shade of Oak" (2018), deals with the position of the oak in Zagros habitants' life from the perspective of material functions and its role in the popular literature. However, what has been investigated in the current study is the mythical role of the oak from

the perspective of sanctity and its reflection in the art (Fig. 1).

Method

The role of the oak motif in the ritual background of the culture of Zagros inhabitants was analyzed first using a bibliographic method based on the historical and archeological documents and then scrutinized by an inferential method.

Theoretical framework

• Mythical and sacred plants

The tree is one of the manifestations of God's power and a sacred element in the ancient beliefs of the world's tribes and nations. The sanctity of the tree and plant from ancient times to the present day has been referred to in its various manifestations in mythology, literature, and popular culture. However, besides the religious and cultural factors, some of these sacred trees are valuable genetic and ecological resources of resistant species, which can provide valuable results if studied. The longevity of the tree species and their greatness and splendor have been effective in this sanctity in a way that they have played an effective role in the region's ecosystem balance, and the elimination of them could damage the natural balance of the region (Bahrami, 2013).

With the scientific name *Quercus*, the oak tree is a long-living tree. They sometimes live up to 2000



Fig. 1. Kermanshah, Zagros Oak National Day Commemoration Ceremony at Biston World Yard. Source: www.mehrnews.com/news.

years, and there are various species of them in Iran, which are indigenous to the Alborz and Zagros Mountain Range. The Iranian indigenous oak trees are morphologically divided into Darmazu, Sefidmazu, Bolandmazu, Yule, and Iranian Oak tree groups (Fattahi, 1994). Moreover, due to growth in the vicinity or courtyard of some holy places and shrines, these trees are especially respected under the titles of “Darmorad” or “Darmazar.” Some general characteristics of the oak tree, such as the longevity, splendor, height, shade, being mixed with the beliefs and myths, the charcoal produced from its wood, and its stability while burning are among other reasons for its sanctity in public opinions because “fire” was a sacred element for Iranian tribes, a sign of life and a symbol of some gods such as Bahram.

The application and concept of the oak tree in the public livelihood, beliefs, and culture can be investigated from the two material and spiritual aspects, each reflecting ancient beliefs (Fig. 2).

Material applications

The oak tree and its fruit are especially important in the material-economic and traditional life of the Bakhtiari Tribe and the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. It has numerous applications in different industrial, medical, and social areas for the inhabitants of this region. The people use the oak to produce bread, feed their livestock, harden the waterskin, produce coal, and for dying and traditional medicine (Mehdipour, 2018, 115). In the book, “AL-Baniyah an Haghawgh al-Dawiyah,” the healing properties of the oak for the treatment of ulcers have been mentioned, and according to the local people, the oak bread is very useful for treating stomach diseases. Oak ash is very useful for treating infectious diseases (ibid.). Also, in the popular myths of the Medieval Times, it is said that touching the injured part of the body and then dipping the same nail in the oak tree healed the patient. Thus, the medicinal properties of plants have become a magical power

and have been praised by the people (Shariati Rad, Sharifi & Toghiani, 2019a, 174). Among the oak's other industrial uses, it should be mentioned the production of Shiitake mushrooms as well as the production of medicine and leather by the inhabitants of Zagros; and also the use of its strong and durable wood as a roof in the construction of brick houses in the past, and the use of oak as a base by nomads to set up their black tents from the past until now (Mehdipour, 2018, 124). Also, in the very distant past, the oak tree was used as a construction material in Eastern Europe, and in addition to the mass use of oak timber in house building, it has been extensively used to build merchant vessels and warships.

Oak semiotics, spiritual applications

• Evaluation of the role of oak tree in the folklore

In the dialect of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, the oak tree is named ‘Bali’ and ‘Balit,’ symbols of resistance and strength in the public culture. The oak tree forests have played an undeniable role in creating a spirit of cheerfulness and courage, heroism and bravery in the people of this land. According to local legend, the oak tree heralds the arrival of spring (ibid.):

- For whom should I make my heart happy, O believers? With the trunk of the coriander and oak trees, I set fire to the world.

- The wild almond is very lying and bloodthirsty. As long as the coriander and oak trees bloom, no one says spring has arrived.

(Description: the wild almond blooms in late winter, sooner than other trees, so the poet calls it “liar.” Meanwhile, all eyes are on the oak tree).

The oak tree is especially manifested in their folklore, and the peak of its oral use can be seen in the parables.

- At the end of the oak picking season, you look for the Jeld Deraz.

By cover, a long and thin stick is meant to shake the oak fruit out (Azarshab, 2012, 14). This parable is indicative of the selection of the right time to do

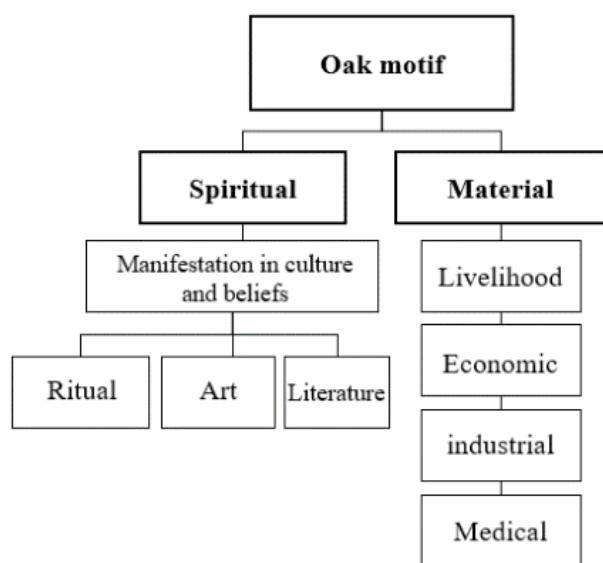


Fig. 2. Investigating the role of oak from both material and spiritual aspects. Source: Authors.

anything so that it will advance properly and be fruitful. In the local poems of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, the sanctity of the oak tree, the symbol of life, can be seen (Shariati Rad et al., 2019b, 183).

- May my oak tree bear fruit, and may my short-eared stocky goat breed, and may I eat oak bread and yogurt to fulfill my wishes.

The oak nut, this solid and efficient fruit, has found such a place in the feelings and folklore of the Bakhtiari tribe as if it is a symbol of these people. "In many traditions, the oak tree is sacred since it blocks lightning and symbolizes greatness and glory. The oak tree has been synonymous with strength in all times and places, and it is quite conceivable that this attribute is attributed to it when the tree is growing. On the other hand, in Latin, the word 'oak' and 'strength are the same, which is also a symbol of moral and physical strengths altogether" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2000, 24).

• Ritual-Mythical Symbols

People's religious beliefs about plants and trees are rooted in myths. Today, in many holy places, the people sacrifice near the sacred trees and sometimes hang a hair or cloth on its branches and ask for help from sacred trees.

• The role of Oak tree in Iran

The oak tree has a special place in the culture of the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad. The Pol Borun, sacrifice, Chaleh Garm Konan, and taking an oath are among the existing rituals of people, which are still performed in the same past style, rooted in ancient Iranian customs. The Introduction of some sacred rituals and customs related to the oak tree:

- Pol Barun Ritual: The most important belief in the sanctity of the oak tree for the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad can be seen in the hair cutting in the grief rituals of these people. In this ritual, the women cut their hair and bury it under an oak tree to keep their young ones away from death. They believe that there is a relationship between them and their hair, and since the oak tree has firm roots, which make it stable and resistant to the wind, these women bury their hair under the oak tree so that their hair roots would not weaken and they would not go bald. Therefore, the burial of hair- mostly women's hair- under the oak tree after the mourning of the deceased's spouse, which is usually done by all women in the region in the spring, is interwoven with the rain and rebirth of the nature and a symbol of life. This ritual has a long history in the ancient Iranian culture and is also done by Farangis when Siavash dies in Shahnameh of Ferdowsi (Shariati Rad et al., 2019a, 179).

- Sacrifice Ritual: The animal is sacrificed under the oak tree on the top of the mountain or under a herb beside a river so that its blood will be shed as a sign of the fertility of the earth (ibid., 69). It should be noted that sacrificing under a tree is a reminder of one of the famous archetypes in the world of mythology. On the other hand, growing a plant from the blood, which indicates the ever firm connection between the plant god and nature's greenness and fertility, makes their fertile nature more highlighted" (Eliade, 1997, 270).

- Chaleh Garm Konan Ritual: In this ritual, in addition to bringing greenery to the graves before Nowruz, people put eight oak sticks beneath the tripod. After starting the fire, the rice and milk, broth, or lentils

are cooked and distributed to the people. However, the secret to cooking rice with eight oak sticks can be searched in their prayers:

May the Mehr be your companion and protect you when passing the bridge of Chinood.

The eight oak sticks denote the eight companions of Mitra because it is said in Mehrisht of Avesta (Verse 10, Clause 45) that the eight companions of Mehr are sitting at the height as observers of the covenant and watch over the violators: "Eight of her companions are sitting at the top of the mountains, like the watch of the Mehr on the towers, who are worried about the Derojan" (Avesta, 2013, 364). Based on the same attitude and function of this God on the day of resurrection in the judgment of the good and bad deeds on the Al Siraat (razor-edged bridge), the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad make a broth and distribute it to please the souls of the deceased (Shariati Rad et al., 2019b, 86).

- Swearing: The act of swearing is the last way to prove one's rightness of words and distinguish the good-doer from the bad-doer in the people of this tribe. Regarding the background of swearing by the plant's gum in ancient Iran, It is also common among the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad to swear by the plant. They swear by the greenness of the tree, especially the oak tree, to prove their rightness of words:

Swear by the greenness of this oak tree

Swear by the green leaves of the oak tree

This swear notes an important point: the emphasis on the word 'oak tree.' It implies the sanctity of the oak tree. In the beliefs of the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, each tree branch is equal to a bird's wing. These people consider the value of trees' lives equal to that of the men. So, to protect the trees, they believe that cutting or breaking any branch of the oak tree equals breaking the birds' wings. In the 'Garshasb Nameh,' the mythical Garshasb faces a tree in India; everybody injures its branches and trunk with iron. The tree groans and roars and blood

flows from its veins. The same belief can be found among the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad about the oak and Persian turpentine trees grown near the Imamzadehs shrines (ibid., 178, 186).

The Role of Oak Tree in the World:

Honoring and blessing the trees and even worshipping them is so common worldwide. Many myths have talked about the tree of life; a tree that is the center and fulcrum of the world, and its fruits bring eternity and immortality (Dadvar & Mansouri, 2006, 25-26). The oak tree of Dodona is one of the different forms of the tree of life in Egypt. It is mentioned as a sacred tree on the earth. It symbolizes fragile power in China since the wind curves it but does not break it. For Christians, the oak tree is the symbol of the determination of Jesus. While it has been the symbol of the divine character and presence for the Jews. It has also been the symbol of heroism and devotion (Dadvar & Taran, 2009, 49). Also, the oak tree has been in the position of the gods in the Greek, Roman, and Celtic (an Indo-European tribe) myths, and it has been sometimes very sacred in the Indo-European culture (Cooper, 2013, 62). In the following, we will provide a brief description of the position of the oak tree among these tribes:

The Celts: The oak tree has been sacred for the Celtic people. The Celtic tree of life, also known as Crann Bethadh, is the image of a tree whose branches reach up to the sky, and its roots are in the ground. This tree represents the unity with nature, the tie between the ground and the sky, and the balance. In the Celtic culture and beliefs, the tree of life has a special power, and whenever a new habitat is built, the oak tree (Crann Bethadh) is planted at its center. Important ceremonies such as marriage and sacrifice are held beside this tree. Also, the trees were considered the primitive ancestors of humans and a window between the worlds of the dead and the alive and other transcendental worlds. Different tree symbols for the ancient Celtic tribes have had concepts such as European ash as the symbol of

wisdom and submission and the Birch tree as the symbol of youth and rebirth. However, the most sacred tree was the oak tree, which symbolized the central axis of the world (Axis Mundi) (Cirlot, 2010); (Fig.3).

Greece and Rome: The works obtained from the Ancient Greek ages indicate their religious background in the belief that plants are totems and scared. A type of sacred oak tree was attributed to a mysterious voice and oracle (Grimal, 2014). Investigating the parallel myths among the gods and the trees, the relationship between the Jupiter in Rome and Zeus in Greece, who was the gods of skies and thunders (lightning), and the oak tree due to its lightning attraction can be seen (Malherb, 2008). The oak nuts sanctity is rooted in the folklores of the Scandinavian people. They considered it to be a symbol of good luck. The oak tree in the Scandinavian, Greek, and Roman beliefs has been the habitat of the fertility goddess, and there are many references in the Bible to oak. Later, the oak tree became the sacred tree of the Romans. Also, in the wedding ceremonies of the Romans, oak branches were carried to guarantee a fertile joint (Warner, 2007, 579-580).

Vikings: The Vikings are the habitant of the Scandinavian people from the 'Norse' race, whose history dates back to several centuries before Christ's birth. The oak tree symbolizes "Odin," the great God of Vikings. Vikings were a warrior tribe who captured and sacrificed their enemies on the oak tree trunk and then announced their loyalty to their gods by hanging their corpses from the scared tree (Doty, 2018).

Germans: For Germans, the 'Yggdrasil' oak tree, whose branches reached up to the sky, has always been green and had the position of the gods, especially the plant gods (Mokhtarian, 2013, 130).

Slavs: For the Slavic tribes, the oak tree is sacred due to its longevity and resistance, as if it is a symbol of immortality, which has been one of the



Fig. 3. Celtic tree of life. Source: www.sagapodcast.ir/essay.

ancient human desires (Alastair, 2008).

The oak tree is also culturally important in other countries of the world. As in England, Estonia, France, Germany, Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, USA, Basque Country, Wales, Bulgaria, and Serbia, it has been selected as the national symbol. In North Ireland, the name of a city means oak, which symbolizes that country. The oak symbolizes some political parties, such as the British Conservative Party. In the U.S. military rankings, the golden and silver leaves of the oak tree symbolize the second colonel and captain. Oak is also engraved on the surface of one of the oldest British coins (six-pence). The oak branch in France is considered a symbol of wisdom and a national symbol of this country (Fig. 4).

The oak tree motif has been observed in the passage of time and place. This tree is the symbol of victory and power for the victorious emperors. As the

symbols of gods on the earth, the ancient kings were manifested with crowns made of oak tree leaves. In the image below, one of these royal crowns of Greece is seen with a golden ring of oak leaves, and small oak fruits are also hidden under the leaves. This golden ring dates back to about 2400 years ago and is made of two semicircular tubular shapes connected with a wire at the end. Today, the Roman King's Golden Ring is displayed at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Kendell, 2002); (Fig. 5).

The Oak tree in Sassanid era decorations

• Ctesiphon Palace

The oak tree motif has been observed in the Kish, Ctesiphon, Chal Tarkhan, and Al-Ma'arid palaces' stucco works in the Sassanid Era (Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 1742; Lakpour, 2010, 252-253). In the Ctesiphon Palace, the interpenetrating leaves are S-shaped and have created a complex motif at the end of the oak fruit that is a prelude to the emergence of future arabesque motifs (Ghirshman, 1999, 200). In this motif, in addition to the symbolic use of oak plant and fruit, which is a sign of security, fertility and durability, we see another prominent feature of Sassanid art, namely symmetry; this paved the way for decorative plant motifs in later periods, especially Arabesque motifs in the Islamic period (Mobini & Shafei, 2016, 56); (Fig. 6).

• Taq-e Bostan

The embossed tree of life in the Taq-e Bostan is a combination of plant elements such as the grape leaves, lotus buds, coniferous leaves, small and

multi-petal flowers, and fruits like oak or chard (it is not clear exactly what plant it is) (Javadi & Avarzamani, 2016, 131). Meanwhile, the myth of the tree of life is known in the culture of many nations of the world as an evergreen tree which always flourishes and is full of grace and its fruits are accompanied by eternity and immortality (Dadvar & Mansouri, 2006, 26-25). Therefore, according to the sanctity, ancient history, and myths of oak trees in pre-Islamic architectural decorations, especially in the Sassanid era (Haidarnattaj & Maghsoudy, 2019), the healing and edible properties of oak fruit in ancient times and its symbolic aspects such as endurance, strength, and longevity, are the same characteristics owned by the Bakhtiari individuals who are known for, adhere to and somehow empathize with (Madadi, 2007, 56); It can be said that the fruit of the tree of life in the motifs of Taq-e Bostan is the same as the fruit of the oak tree (Fig. 7).

• Seymareh Mosque

The stucco decorations of Seymareh Mosque belong to the late Umayyad and early Abbasid periods (Lakpour, 2010, 67). In a general and comprehensive study, the plant motifs used in the stucco decorations of Seymareh Mosque are pomegranate, grape, palm, pine tree, lotus, oak fruit, and artichoke leaf, which in pre-Islamic times, pomegranate, grape, palm, and pine were the symbols of fertility, immortality, blessing. lotus, the oak fruit, and artichoke leaves have been introduced as symbols of life, security, fertility, victory, and overcoming problems. An interesting point in the study of plant and geometric designs of Seymareh Mosque is the variety of different designs and executive forms of some decorative motifs. For example, in the decorations of the Seymareh Mosque, the oak fruit is circular in shape and with dense scales on its surface, a five-petal and sometimes three-petal crown is depicted (Sharifinia & Sanaeinejad, 2019, 8); (Fig. 8).



Fig. 4. from right to left: The role of the oak cross fork, the British six-pence coin, and the French national emblem. Source: Wikipedia.com.



Fig. 5. The oak tree fruit in the Greek kings crown and accessories. 4th century B.C., Source: www.metmuseum.org.



Fig. 6. The interpenetrated leaves with the oak fruit at the end. Ctesiphon Palace. Source: www.metmuseum.org.

The oak fruit symbolizes birth when it leaves and its pod, like an egg, which is a symbol of abundance, happiness, and fertility. In the mystical sense, like religious symbols, it symbolizes the power of the soul and the rich virtue of truth. This truth has originated from two sources divine revelation and nature (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 2000).

• Noh Gonbad Mosque of Balkh

The Noh Gonbad Mosque of Balkh, known as “Haji Piadeh,” is located seven kilometers south of Balkh and west of present-day Mazar-e-Sharif and dates back to the third or fourth centuries A.H. (9th or

10th A.D.). One of the most important features of the mosque is its stucco decorations (Naji, 2007, 396). Plant motifs of grape and palm leaves, oak fruits, and lotus flowers have covered all the decorative surfaces of this building (Haidarnattaj & Maghsoudy, 2019, 44).

In addition to the apparent similarity between the stucco patterns of Seymarch Mosque and the decorations of Balkh Mosque, the type of composition of these motifs also shows other angles of the similarity of the design of the decorative surfaces of these two mosques. For example, we can refer to cases such as creating wing-shaped patterns and placing oak fruit in its center (Mobini, Shakarami, & Sharifinia, 2018, 68). Of course, the interpretation of the wing is the same as the two-branched leaves, which later became known as arabesque (Fig. 9).

• Aljaito Altar and Naein Grand Mosque

Aljaito altar is one of the most beautiful works of the Ilkhanate era in terms of its stuccos. The Naein Grand Mosque, which is considered to belong to the middle of the fourth century, uses the Sassanid method in its decorations and is a complete example of stucco motifs influenced by Sassanid designs in the early Islamic period (Ansari, 1987, 359-358). Examining the motifs and decorations of the Aljaito Altar and the Naein Grand Mosque, oak-like motifs can be observed (Fig. 10).

Discussion

• Transfer of the plant motifs with common themes and concepts

Regarding the investigation and comparison conducted between the ancient Iranian buildings (Sassanid Era) and the Umayyad and Abbasid Era's buildings, the influence of Iranian art on the Islamic Era, especially the plant motifs, is obvious. These motifs include the leaves and branches, palmette, artichoke leaves, acanthus, pomegranate, oak, etc., which are sometimes similar to Hellenic-Greek motifs (Azami, Sheikhol Hokamae & SheikholHokamae, 2013,



Fig. 7. The motif of the tree of life and oak fruit. Source: Javadi & Avarzamani, 2016.

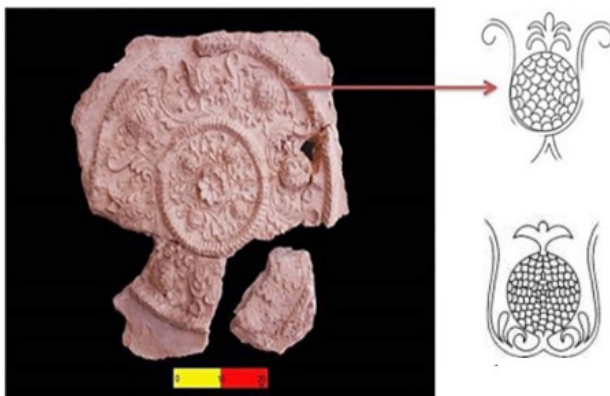


Fig. 8. The image and decorative motif of oak fruit in the stuccos of Seymareh Mosque. Source: Lakpour, 2010.

22). The point that some historians have noted and considered as the reason for the presence of Hellenic art along with the Iranian art of the Umayyad and Abbasid eras is the presence of artichoke and oak plants in the motifs of this era's buildings such as the Taq-e Bostan and Ctesiphon Palace. Such an issue indicates that despite the extensive use of these plants in Hellenic art, they have also been

used in the Sassanid Era's architecture. These motifs were transferred to the Sassanid Era and then to Islamic art due to their having religious themes and cultural and artistic commonalities (Heidarnataj & Maghsoudi, 2019). The grapevine with the branch, leaves, and grapes, the flower, fruit, and leaves of pomegranate, palm tree leaves, artichoke leaves, and sometimes the fig fruit have been observed in the Sassanid decorative motifs. These designs and variations have been extended and continue to be manifest in Islamic art. Among the prevalent plant motifs in the decorations of Islamic art is the arabesque, which is the same branched leaves and twisted stems, commonly known as arabesque, (Fig. 11 & 12). What is notable, however, is the appearance of the oak motif in various forms in Islamic decorations (Table 1).

The oak is a corpulent and long-living tree, and its fruit was the first food of man. The primitives made their covenant under the oak tree as a sign of a safe tree (Warner, 2007, 580-579). Therefore, it has a religious-ritual aspect and sanctity in addition to the decorative aspect. Although the sanctity of the oak tree—which is related to Indo-European culture—has faded in Iranian culture, in middle Persian Texts, Avesta, and Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, due to religious and intellectual corrections in the stories and changes in permutations, this sanctity has remained in folklore culture to clarify the ritual structure and its origin (Shariati Rad et al., 2019a, 181). The oak is a corpulent and long-living tree, and its fruit was the first food of man. The primitives made their covenant under the oak tree as a sign of safety (Warner, 2007, 580-579). Therefore, it has a religious-ritual aspect and sanctity in addition to the decorative aspect. Although the sanctity of the oak tree—which is related to Indo-European culture—has faded in Iranian culture, in middle Persian Texts, Avesta, and Shahnameh of Ferdowsi, due to religious and intellectual corrections in the stories and changes in permutations, this sanctity has remained

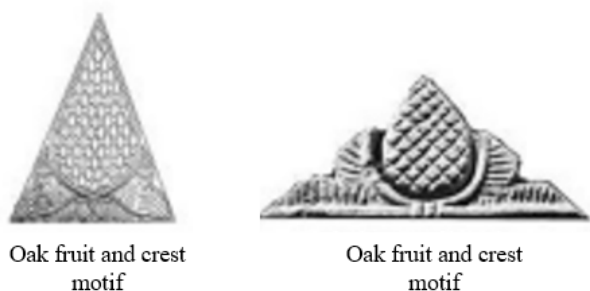


Fig. 9. Motifs of oak tree fruit and crest in the Noh Gonabd of Balkh and the Seymarch Mosque. Source: Mobini, Shakaarami & Sharifinia, 2018, 63.



Fig. 10. Arabesque forms of oak motifs. Source: Azami et al., 2013.



Fig. 11. The motifs in stuccos of Seymarch Mosque with the Arabesque motifs on them. Source: Lakpour, 2010.



Fig. 12. Samples of stucco decorations in Noh Gonbad Mosque of Balkh, late 2nd century A.H., simple arabesque in a two-branch leaf. Source: www.archnet.org.

in folklore culture to clarify the ritual structure and its origin (Shariati Rad et al., 2019a, 181). In the culture and social life of the Middle Zagros, especially in the region of Lorestan, the oak tree is a symbol of sturdiness, uprightness, and stability. As seen in the naming of the people and places, some names such as Darbali, Pirbali, Barabali, and Shabali are inspired by

the unique characteristics of these trees. Such beliefs, which are rooted in the ancient world, and manifest the importance of the tree in human life, lead to the preservation of these trees by people to the extent that they consider these trees to have souls, and this causes them to avoid injuring and cutting down the tree (ibid).

Conclusion

In the Sassanid Era, behind every motif, there was an ancient pattern that in addition to the decorative aspect, has been recorded in their art due to religious reasons. The symbols of blessings, benevolence, fertility, persistence, immortality, longevity, and durability of the monarchy are among such symbols. The results indicated that the oak tree had a significant historical value for the ancients and the Sassanids. In addition to mythical aspects, it has also been important in terms of food and medicinal uses. The oak tree has been the symbol of power, victory, and fertility. It has had a spiritual value and, finally, one of the manifestations of the human beliefs in the Sassanid Age. Also, oak plays a significant role in the material and spiritual life of the Zagros people due to the type, function, and meaning that it has for the lifestyles and patterns of living, cultural-literary, and mythological beliefs. They have sworn to the green of the oak to prove their words which is an important reason for the importance of oak to these people; in such a way that they bury their hair and nails under this tree for fertility and immunity from disease and magic. Therefore, since the preservation of plant structures and beliefs among the people of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad has their roots in ancient Iran, it can be said that the oak tree is a living example of ancient heritage and ancestral relics whose material and spiritual attributes have led to sanctity and blessing of it by the Iranians, especially the people of Zagros by whom the old ritual of Oak Festival is still held.

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Table 1. Comparison of the oak motifs in the pre-Islamic and Islamic era. Source: authors.

Oak	Building	Historical era	
✻	Ctesiphon	Sassanid	Pre-Islamic
✻	Taq-e Bostan		
—	Qabbah al- Sakhras Mosque		
—	Khirbat al-Mafjar Palace	Umayyad	Islamic
—	Al- Mashti Palace		
✻	Seymareh Mosque		
✻	Noh Gonbad Mosque	Abbasid	
✻			

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