

## **The Symbolic Evaluation of the Motif of the Horse in the Potteries of the Seljuk Period**

### **Abstract**

In the history of Iranian pottery, the Seljuk period can be mentioned as the golden age of this art among the other present arts of this stage. Such potteries are significant for their design features and motifs. The motifs of the pottery of this period speak of the creativity and genius of the artists of this era and were executed with special skill and artistry. Various motifs such as animal, herbal and human motifs are used in the pottery of this period, and each of these motifs includes various meanings and concepts. The image of the horse is one of the animal elements used in Seljuk period pottery and was widely used in various forms in the pottery of this period. The present research has analyzed the symbolic meanings and forms of this image in the composition of the pottery of the two cities of Ray and Kashan during the Seljuk period by following an analytical and descriptive method. The results of the research show that the motif of the horse in the ceramics of the Seljuk period has appeared in various themes such as hunting, banquets, court ceremonies and war. Moreover, independently as a symbol, the motif of the horse represents freedom, power, speed and beauty and thus such concepts are manifested in the form of a horse.

### **Research aims:**

۱. Acknowledging the themes and symbolic meanings of the motif of the horse in the ceramics of the Seljuk period.
۲. Studying the form, position and placement of the horse figure in Seljuk period pottery.

### **Research questions:**

۱. What symbolic themes and meanings are used in the horse motifs on Seljuk pottery?
۲. What are the visual characteristics of the form, position and state of the horse on Seljuk pottery?

**Keywords:** pottery, horse motif, symbol, Seljuk period.

## Introduction

Pottery, a handmade piece shaped by ancestors, has accepted many roles in its evolution since ancient times; in addition, in its evolution, its even and fragile surface has constantly been a means of expressing the artist's imaginations and inner feelings. In the making, designing and decorating vessels, the element of perfection and beauty is masterfully applied; thus, the pottery of the Islamic era can be considered the masterpiece of Iranian pottery art in terms of technical innovations and variety of themes. Regarding the history of Islamic pottery, the Seljuk period is considered as one of the most brilliant stages of this art. The pottery of this era is one of the valuable artistic and cultural works which despite the absence of exemplified written documents, presents a clear picture of Iranian art pottery and presents significant variety in terms of decoration and shape. Patterns and motifs are used on the potteries of the Seljuk era including animal motifs (the motif of horse and rider). Throughout history, the motif of the horse has been present in myths and customs of different cultures beholding various concepts and meanings.

Experts consider the modern horse to be the evolution of the original horse, which underwent changes in different lands. Its presence and importance can be well understood by passing and commenting on Iranian artworks. It was transferred from the Sassanid period with a change in forms and decorations from the beginning of Islam then it was used on dishes in the following periods according to the characteristics of the artworks of that period. In this research, it is sought to investigate and analyze the motif of the horse and its contexts and uses in the art pottery of the Seljuk period and to clarify the ambiguities in the field of the effects and causes of carving such motifs. Here it is assumed that: ۱) the use of horse motifs on Seljuk period pottery has symbolic and practical themes ۲) the beliefs and views of the potter and the supporters of these works have had an impact on the use of this motif ۳) in the motifs of the Seljuk vessels, elements and themes related to common beliefs before Islam are applied. In this regard, the main objective of this research to summarize and analyze the image of a horse on Seljuk pottery, particularly the pottery of the cities of Kashan and Ray, as they were important and influential centers of pottery making in the mentioned period.

Regarding prior research on the topic of the horse motif on Seljuk pottery, the following researches can be mentioned: in her article, Farideh Talebpour (۲۰۰۹) has discussed the placement of the horse's saddle in the art of ancient Iran, emphasizing its mythological importance, Mohammad Hassan Samsar (۱۹۶۳) discussed the importance of the horse and its decorations in ancient Iran; also, the different manifestations of the horse, its history in the art

of ancient Iran have been considered in a content and structural analysis. Leila Sharifi and Adham Zargham (۲۰۱۲) also analyzed the role of the horse from the perspective of form and content in the Median and Achaemenes periods, emphasizing its place and formation on practical objects and rock paintings. Also, in the Master's thesis of Shervin Faridnejad at the University of Tehran (۲۰۰۶), he examined the motif of the horse in Iranian beliefs, myths and traditions of the historical era, and its role in Zarinehs, Siminehs, and paintings by considering the murals and reliefs of the Sassanid era. In the section of paintings and epic narratives, the article of Amir Rezaei Nabard (۲۰۰۹) can be noted in which the position and role of the horse in the works of Mahmoud Farshchian is discussed with reference to its artistic expression and its psychological and semiotic concepts. Farzad Ghaemi and Mohammad Jafar Yahaghi (۲۰۰۹) pointed out that the role of the horse as the most repeated symbolic animal in the evolution of the archetype of the hero through its manifestations in the Shahnameh.

Based on the nature and method, the current research follows a descriptive-analytical method. The technique of collecting information is combined including library sources and research records. It is worth mentioning that the statistical population includes ۱۲ earthenware figures inscribed with the image of a horse from the Seljuk period from the cities of Kashan and Ray. The items have not previously been studied regarding visual and analytical aspects. The classification of this pattern on the pottery presented in tables were used as a measuring tool, thus, by focusing on the assortment and visual features seen on pottery patterns, it is possible to analyze the motifs of horses.

## **Conclusion**

It can be said that the pottery works that have been studied in this research are all engraved with horse images that are drawn with different colors on the surface of pottery. During the detailed examination of the pottery sample, various aspects and faces of the horse motifs were extracted and the frameworks and appearances of these motifs were determined and the visual details were scrutinized in a table.

After the investigations that were carried out on the motifs and designs on the pottery in question, returning to the original question, it is possible to provide a relatively complete and well-reasoned interpretation and description of the causes and factors of the designs on the pottery. In response to the research question, according to the inquiries, it can be supposed that the artist of this era consciously and with unique elegance and accuracy attempted to draw the shapes, moreover, by considered the aesthetical values, the artist sought to preserve realism

and concentrate on the intended target. According to the way of designing this role, the potter has considered a special design and paid attention to the way it is placed on the surface of the vessel, which is usually seen as the central and main motif among other patterns. Considering that horse motifs witnessed various symbolic and conceptual aspect in prior periods, the potter has applied the same motif by considering similar symbolic expressions. Compensating close attention to the placement of this role next to other motifs, as well as concerning its content and artistic expression, the variety of artistic expression of the role of the horse is seen in various themes such as hunting, banquets, court ceremonies, war and independently as a symbol of awareness and knowledge. The knowledge and awareness of the potter artist towards the society and the circumstances of that age compared to previous eras in order to present the motif of the horse in various concepts, have motivated the potter to revise the motif in terms of shape, content and concept and create an intelligent combination of the mentioned motif in relation to symbolic and figurative concepts.

In this period, the potter was not limited to the themes and traditions of prior art and despite setting a model and using the original artistic principles, he granted a proper and worthy place to the horse and to all decorative motifs of this period; it is noteworthy to mention that this was accomplished via his mastermind and by considering the standards of aesthetics and symbolic expression that has attracted the attention of various art scholars. As mentioned while examining the works, the role of the horse, in addition to its function in the daily affairs and personal life of humans, it bestows a symbolic and artistic purpose. That is, the artist has avoided the usual and conventional view of the horse and its functions and has looked at this animal and its artistic expression from a different angle. The role of the horse in the sample of pottery in question is a sign and symbol of freedom, power, speed and beauty.

## References

Apanlu, Sajjad. (۲۰۰۷). Seahorse in Pahlavi stories, from myth to epic, Haft Gofar in Shahnameh Research, Mashhad: Academic Jihad Publications. [In Persian].

Bashiriyah, Hossein. (۱۹۹۰). Political sociology, the role of social forces in political life, Tehran: Ney Publishing. [In Persian].

Chevalier, Jean and Gerbran, Alain. (۲۰۰۰). A culture of symbols, translated and researched by Sudaba Fazali, Tehran: Jihoon. [In Persian].

Christian Sen, Arthur. (۱۹۹۳). Iran during the Sasanian era, translated by: Rashid Yasmi, Tehran: Duniya Kitab Publications. [In Persian].

College, Malcolm. (۲۰۰۶). Ashkanian, translation: Masoud Rajabnia, Tehran, Publisher: Hirmand. [In Persian].

- Dawoodi, Nader. (۲۰۰۳). Works of Iran in the Metropolitan Museum, Tehran: Cultural Publications. [In Persian].
- Espur, Dennis. (۲۰۰۴). The motivation to create, translated by Amir Jalaluddin Aalam, Tehran: Nilofar and Dostane. [In Persian].
- Farid Tankabani, Morteza. (۲۰۰۷). Nahj al-Fasaha, Tehran: Islamic Publishing House. [In Persian].
- Faridnejad, Sherwin. (۲۰۰۶). Examining the role of the horse in Siminehs, Zarinehs, wall paintings and Sasanian reliefs, Master's thesis, University of Tehran. [In Persian].
- Girshman, novel. (۱۹۶۰). Iranian Art in the Median and Achaemenid Periods, translated by: Isa Behnam, Tehran: Book Translation and Publishing Company. [In Persian].
- Gustave, Edmund. fan Group name (۱۹۶۳). Unity and diversity in the Islamic world, translated by Abbas Arianpour, Tabriz: Marafat. [In Persian].
- Hall, James. (۲۰۰۴). Pictorial anthology of symbols in the art of East and West, translated by Ruqieh Behzadi, Tehran: Farhang Maazer. [In Persian].
- Hatem, Gholam Ali. (۱۹۹۰). Patterns and Symbols in Ancient Iranian Pottery, Journal of Art and Architecture, No. ۲۸, pp. ۳۷۸-۳۰۰. [In Persian].
- Hamza Lo, Manouchehr. (۲۰۰۲). Designs of Iranian pottery in the Seljuq period, Mah Honar Magazine, No. ۴۶-۴۰. [In Persian].
- J. Christie, Willen. (۱۹۸۷). History of Iran's Industries, translated by Abdullah Faryar, Tehran: Yesavali Publications. [In Persian].
- Jobs, Grotrud. (۱۹۹۱). Symbols (the first book of animals), translated and edited by Mohammad Reza Baghapoor, Tehran: Translator's Publications. [In Persian].
- Jung, Carl Gustav. (۲۰۰۴). Man and his symbols, translated by: Mahmoud Soltanieh, Tehran: Jami Publications. [In Persian].
- Kambakhsh Fard, Saifullah. (۲۰۰۰). Pottery and pottery in Iran from the beginning of the Neolithic to the modern era, Tehran, Publications: Qaqnos. [In Persian].
- Kian, Maryam. (۲۰۰۸). Safal Iran, Tehran: Circle Publications. [In Persian].
- Pope, Arthur and Phyllis Ackerman. (۲۰۰۸). A journey through Iranian art from prehistoric times to today, Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications. [In Persian].
- Qavidel, Azam. (۲۰۰۲). Investigation of Seljuk era terracotta motifs, master's thesis, Al-Zahra University. [In Persian].
- Qolizadeh, Khosrow. (۱۹۹۹). Persian mythology (based on Pahlavi texts), Tehran: Parse Kitab Publishing Company. [In Persian].
- Rafiei, Leila. (۱۹۹۸). Safal Iran, Tehran: Yesavali Publications. [In Persian].
- Rezae Bard, Amir. (۲۰۰۹). The position of the horse in the works of Professor Mahmoud Farshchian, Negreh Research Analytical Quarterly, No. ۱۲. [In Persian].

Samsar, Mohammad Hassan. (۱۹۶۴). The importance of the horse and its decorations in ancient Iran, Tehran, Art and People Magazine, No. ۲۰, ۳۲, ۴۱. [In Persian].

Sharifi, Leila and Adham Zargham. (۲۰۱۲). Evolution of the image of the horse from the Median period to the Achaemenid period, Negreh Research Analytical Quarterly, No. ۲۸, pp. ۴۱-۵۷. [In Persian].

Shepherd, Ann. (۱۹۹۶). Fundamentals of Art Philosophy, translated by Ali Ramin, Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications. [In Persian].

Talebpour, Farida and Mandana Parham. (۲۰۰۹). The position of the horse in the art of ancient Iran, Jaloh Honar Magazine, No. ۱. [In Persian].