

## **Illustrating the Epic and Mythological Literature on Sgraffiato Pottery; by Introducing the Pottery Samples of the Institute of Bonyad Museums**

### **Abstract**

Myths are a significant part of societies' beliefs and cultures. In addition to the oral and written history of nations, traces of myths can also be found in the remaining works. The use of epic motifs has been effective not only in the art of painting, but also in pottery motifs. The decorative motifs of pottery can be an echo of the cultural, social and political developments of societies of various historical periods. Some of the drawings on the pottery are taken from an ancient heritage with a mythological emphasis. These works, similar to historical texts, have a great contribution in preserving and introducing the myths of a society. This research aims to study the interaction between the themes of Persian epic literature and Sgraffiato pottery motifs of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries Hegira located in the collection of Bonyad museums. In the process of this research, the analysis and origin of these pottery motifs are often depicted based on the poems and mythological themes discussed. Data is collected via library research. Findings show that the function of the continuity and influence of myths in a symbolic way on the belief of the people, especially the pottery artists during the middle Islamic periods, is imperative due to the values and national identity of the past.

### **Research aims:**

1. A study and analysis of illustrative themes and symbolic concepts of Sgraffiato pottery.
2. Examining the degree of imitation of Sgraffiato pottery designs from mythological and epic themes of ancient Iran.

### **Research questions:**

1. What was the inspiration of pottery artists in depicting Sgraffiato pottery and selecting their themes?
2. How did the characteristics of epic literature appear on the Sgraffiato pottery motifs and how is it different from other story motifs of other potteries?

**Keywords:** mythology, epic literature, Sgraffiato pottery, Bonyad museums

## **Introduction**

Myths have played a significant role in the development of Iranian identity. The national identity of a land is formed based on the historical, social, cultural, religious and geographical foundations of that society. Considering wisdom, knowledge, cultures and rituals; national myths are among the most significant issues that have been seen in other works of art in addition to poetry and prose. Mythology and art have constantly existed in a two-way affiliation with each other. As the art of pottery is considered one of the most important arts of Iranians in different historical periods, the potter artist has always used a pattern that is influenced by his feelings, perception and inner experience. In the Institute of Bonyad Collections, there are various examples of Sgraffiato pottery in which their designs are influenced by Iranian mythological symbols and patterns. This pottery inspired by pre-Islamic artistic themes, first appeared in early Islamic centuries. One of the most common motifs of studied pottery are the themes of ancient Iranian stories and love poems depicted on enameled pottery. The illustration of the story of Dahhak and Fereydoun, one of the first mythological and dramatic stories of the Shahnameh and one of the most important topics and concepts of the Sgraffiato pottery motifs, will be analyzed in this paper.

The preliminary investigation about this research shows that extensive studies have not been published in this field; apart from for the works done by Freyeh (۱۹۹۵: ۲۵۹) and Sustil (۱۹۸۵: ۶۵). In their research works, they came to the conclusion that most of the examples of Sgraffiato pottery, which are decorated with mythological motifs, are reminiscent of scenes with epic-literary themes of the Shahnameh. While in this article, with a new approach, an attempt has been made to study and recognize the pottery motifs in question and to determine the specific relationship between such potteries and Iranian mythological symbols and patterns. The research method of this research is descriptive and content analysis and its nature is comparative. Data collection has been done by field study and library research. First, by direct observation and sampling method, a number of the potteries of the Bonyad Museums were selected and their motifs and symbols are studied and analyzed.

## **Conclusion**

After the arrival of Islam in the land of Iran, there was a wide cultural and artistic connection between rulers and artists. The renewal of the greatness of Iran before Islam and the attention of the Iranian people and rulers to these national beliefs and traditions was manifested through a process and in the form of various works of art, including pottery. This issue was effective as representing solidarity and consensus of Iranians contrary to Arabs. With the advent of Islam

and the prohibition of the use of cement and gold vessels, the art of pottery gained superior prestige; hence, the pottery artists of the Islamic period applied various motifs to decorate their pottery, mostly taken from Iranian literature and culture with mythological themes. These motifs contain different scenes from the stories of the Shahnameh; moreover, among the different types of pottery of the Islamic period, enameled pottery includes themes of romance and court life. Stories such as Bijan and Manijeh and Bahram and Azadeh display the interest of the people and the rulers of the middle ages of Islam to such themes. In the interim, the mythological motifs of Sgraffiato pottery, which was done with its own scratch and carving method, are significantly different from other pottery. This pottery, which is mostly obtained from the northwest of Iran, was not specific to a particular social class and was mostly ordered by the lower classes of the society. From historical periods until the arrival of Islam, these areas have been associated with the invasion of foreigners; consequently, in this land, myths based on the themes of litigation and seeking justice were formed, examples of which can be seen in the poems of the Shahnameh and the motifs of pottery works. In fact, Ferdowsi has written the spirit of Iranian justice in the language of poetry and the potter artist has depicted it in terracotta decorations; accordingly, it can be stated that each pottery artwork is a page from the Shahnameh. Artists were constantly present in the social environment around them and reflected the spirit of freedom and right-seeking in their works of art. It is possible that the designs of these pottery were ordered by pottery buyers. Indubitably, if this assumption is accepted; many of these motifs have been represented in order to restore the Iranian national identity.

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