

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

بازیابی بن‌مایه و سیر تحول نقش عقاب دوسر در هنر ایران از دوره باستان تا سلجوقی

is also published in this issue of journal.

Original Research Article

Retrieving the Motif and Evolution of the Double-Headed Eagle in Iranian art from Ancient to Seljuk Period*

Mohammad Motevalli¹, Khashayar Ghazizadeh^{2**}, Morteza Afshari³

1. Ph.D. Student in Comparative and Analytical History of Islamic Art, Faculty of Arts, Shahid University, Tehran, Iran.
2. Assistant Professor, Faculty of Arts, Shahid University, Tehran, Iran.
3. Associate Professor, Faculty of Arts, Shahid University, Tehran, Iran.

Received; 07/04/2023

accepted; 29/11/2023

available online; 01/04/2024

Abstract

In ancient civilizations such as Iran and Mesopotamia, an eagle figure can be seen, which has two heads - inclined to the right and left - and with open wings. The continued use of this motif until the Islamic period in Iran and Anatolia made it emerge as a national symbol in the Seljuk period. This motif represents the dominance of the West and the East, and the implied concept of power and kingship. Available sources attribute this motif to the Hittite civilization in the second millennium BC and consider it influenced by Mesopotamian art, while it has a much older history in Iranian art. Today, due to the importance of this motif as an international symbol, as well as the attribution of the background of this motif in the available sources to other civilizations and the concepts hidden in it, the need to investigate and analyze this motif has become more important. The purpose of this research is to find the roots and evolution of the motif of the form and content of the double-headed eagle in the art of ancient Iran until the Seljuk period. Also, identifying the important factors in drawing this motif in Iranian art is another goal of the research, which is done for the first time in Iranian and international sources. This research has been carried out by descriptive-analytical method and by referring to library-documentary sources. The findings showed that this motif was seen for the first time in the 4th millennium BC in Iran and in the pottery of Tal Bakun - a millennium before the Mesopotamian art. The presence of ancient Iranian myths, religions and rituals, popular beliefs about the king, literature, especially the Shahnameh, are among the reasons for the presence of this motif in the pre-Islamic art of Iran and its continuation until the Islamic period.

Keywords: *Ancient Iran, Seljuks, Double-headed eagle, Islamic art.*

*This paper is taken from the PhD thesis of Mohammad Motevalli entitled “ Retrieval the roots of pottery and metalwork motifs of the early Islamic period in Iran: Samanid, Buyids, Seljuk” under the first supervision:

Khashayar Ghazizadeh and the second supervision: Morteza Afshari in the Faculty of Art of Shahed University in 2024.

** corresponding author: ghazizadeh@shahed.ac.ir; +989127051898

Introduction

The eagle is often introduced as the “king of the sky” in ancient civilizations, and has had a prominent presence in Iranian art since ancient times. The reasons for its presence can be attributed to high flying, mastery over the earth, and accordingly, the formation of mythology and cosmological position. The eagle is a symbol of superiority and rulership in the skies. Due to the fact that it lives in the sky and has a nest on the highest peak of the mountains, the eagle is the manifestation of the god of the sky and heavenly power (Khosravi, 2012, 71 Cited in Malekzade Bayani, 1362, 60 & 66). In Iranian mythology, the eagle has a special place. In the legends of creation, he is introduced as the messenger of the sun, who cooperated with Mehr [Mithra] in killing the first cow (Yahghi, 2008, 509-510). During the Achaemenid period, the flight of the eagle was taken as a good omen, and therefore a golden flag with the figure of an eagle was always flying in front of the Achaemenid army. In Parthian and Sasanian art, the eagle has been used as a symbol of the sun god [Mithra] (Dadvar & Mansoori, 2002, 110-111). The double-headed eagle is one of the motifs used in art and ancient civilizations. This motif is often depicted with two heads turned to the right and left, legs spread, and the body shown from the front. In the reliefs and seals of Mesopotamia, this motif is present in the ceremony related to the awarding of the royal insignia, and therefore it can be considered as one of the symbols of the kingdom. In some countries, such as Russia, Albania and Serbia, this motif is present as a national symbol on their flag, and it is interpreted as a sign of mastery over the situation and sovereignty over the West and the East. This motif is mentioned in different sources with two terms “Double-Headed Eagle” (Peker, 1989 & Chariton, 2011) and “Two-headed Eagle” (Popović, 2009), the first term being more common.

In most sources, the motif of the double-headed eagle is considered to be related to Hittite art and

the continuation of the Mesopotamian tradition (Chariton, 2011; Peker, 1989). While this motif is present in pre-Islamic works such as Tal Bakun, Jiroft, Shush and Lorestan and in Elamite, Parthian and Sasanian civilizations, which in some cases are much older than the Mesopotamian samples.

In the Islamic period, this motif was seen for the first time on Buyid dynasty textiles, and the continuation of its widespread use in the Seljuk period has been abundantly seen in the art of Iran and Anatolia. It seems that the continued presence of this motif from the early times to the early Islamic period in Iranian art represents certain reasons and factors that will be discussed in this research. The questions of this research based on its objectives include two main questions:

- In which civilization is the origin of this motif? And if it is in Iran, from which period did it start?
- What are the effective factors in drawing this motif in the art of pre-Islamic Iran and its continuation until the Islamic period?

Research Background

By searching on reputable scientific websites such as Academia and Research Gate, sources were found that are often related to the Hittite civilization and belong to Turkish authors. (Chariton, 2011) in the “The Mesopotamian origin of the Hittite double-headed eagle”, believes that the presence of this motif in Byzantine art is due to the art of the Seljuk Turks, but he refers its origin to the art of the Hittites. “The double-headed eagle was used by the Seljuk Turks and others before it was used in the Byzantine period”, “The double-headed eagle supporting a figure is a new element in Hittite art” (ibid.). This paper is a continuation of his archeology bachelor’s thesis titled “The Function of the Double-headed Eagle at Yazilikaya” (Chariton, 2008) at the University of Wisconsin. He considers this motif as a supporter and protector. “The double-headed eagle is depicted as the patron and protector

of two goddesses” (*ibid.*). In this research, he also believes: “probably the double-headed eagle motifs have a Mesopotamian origin” (*ibid.*). Bojan Popović in “Imperial Usage of Zoomorphic Motifs on Textiles: the Two-Headed Eagle and the Lion in Circles and Between Crosses in the Late Byzantine Period” (Popović, 2009) examines ornaments with animal motifs in Byzantium and in the territories under Byzantine influence. Serkan İliden in “The motif of the eagle in Turkish iconography”, referring to the eagle as a protective spirit on war instruments, considers the double-headed eagle as the guardian of the holy gate in the sky in the beliefs of the Turks (İliden, 2012).

In the field of Islamic art, (Peker, 1989) has investigated this motif in the Seljuk period in Anatolia in his master’s thesis in art history entitled “The double-headed eagle in the Seljuk period”. He also believes that this motif has a Mesopotamia origin, but he considers Iranian art to be influential in this regard. “The appearance of the eagle-griffin or sky eagle in Siberia in the 6th century BC was not the result of the last period of expansion of Iranian culture, but it was a sign of a strong exchange between the Indo-Iranian peoples and the Turkic-Tatar peoples in Asia in connection with the Mesopotamian civilizations” (*ibid.*). In an paper entitled “The double-headed eagle and the Seljuks” (Göksu, 2016), Erkan Göksu examines this motif through the perspective of the “national emblem” and the symbol of “dominion” of the Seljuks and rejects this claim. Nilüfer Ozel In her paper, along with the influence of shamanic beliefs and religious concepts in the use of this motif, considers it as a symbol of power, which caused it to be used by the Seljuk government as a national symbol, and in the Islamic era with new concepts such as luck, protector and power was consolidated (Özel, 2018). Ramzan Uykur, in “Mythological Creatures on the Coins of Ertuqi Turkmens”, investigated the double-headed eagle in the Seljuk period and considered their origin to be related to astronomy, talismans and

astrology (Uykur, 2013). Also, Ramzan Özgan, in “Double-Headed Eagle from Antiquity to Present: Its Meaning, Interpretation and Propaganda”, considers this motif in the Seljuk period as an expression of the support of the caliph and as a result of the unity of the power of religion and government in the Seljuk period (Özgan, 2020). In Iranian sources, no independent source about double-headed eagle was found. Farbod and Poorazizi, in “The impact of Persian textiles of Buyid dynasty and Seljuk Eras on Islamic Spain textiles”, While examining the different motifs of the textiles of this era, they mention the double-headed eagle motif in the eras of Spain and consider it to be the influence of trade and the influence of Iranian Islamic art in that era (Farbod & Poorazizi, 2016). Hadidi and his colleagues Hadidi, Dadour and Akbari in “The cryptography of ancient Iranians regarding the motif of the eagle and its reflection on some artifacts” have investigated the motif of the eagle in Iran from the Achaemenid period to the Sassanid period. The authors state that depicting the motif of the eagle on ancient works is based on the religious and cosmological habits and beliefs of ancient Iranians and has very deep concepts (Hadidi, Dadour & Akbari, 2008, 7). In the field of birds in Iranian art, see “Comparative study on the formology and symbolism of bird motifs on ancient pottery and Islamic period pottery in Iran” (Esnaashari, 2022) and “Investigating motif and forms of birds in ancient Iranian art” (Khosravi, 2012).

Double headed eagle as one of the most important motifs from the ancient period until now due to its presence in various emblems and signs as a national symbol, in Iranian art also has a much older history than the samples known in the great civilizations of the world, but despite not mentioning this. The background has not been addressed and neglected in international sources and in Iranian sources as well. Also, Iranian sources only focus on the motif of the eagle, and from this point of view, it is a new research on this topic.

Research Method

The research method is descriptive-analytical and relies on historical data, and the method of collecting information is library-documentary. The statistical population of this research includes works of art with the motif of double-headed eagle in Iranian art in the period of ancient Iran until the Seljuk period. In this research, first, a brief description of the eagle in the mythology and civilizations of Iran is mentioned, and then the form and content of the double-headed eagle in the art of Iran during the mentioned period is examined, considering the effective factors such as culture, religion, politics, etc. will be Finally, by analyzing the findings, a conclusion is made.

• Eagle in Iranian mythology and civilizations

The eagle has long been one of the most important birds in ancient Iranian art and is often associated with divine power. High flying and sharp claws of this animal have been one of the important reasons for drawing this motif. In some ancient civilizations, the eagle was considered as the lord of the sky and the sign of the sun (Jobes, 1991, 82). According to the searches conducted by the authors in available sources, it seems that the oldest motif of the eagle or falcon in the art of ancient Iran is with the known characteristics of the double-headed eagle, such as open wings, open legs, and drawing the body from the front; It is in a clay pot of 5000 BC in Godin Tepe.

Literary and scientific sources have also mentioned the presence of this motif in ancient Iran. Yahaghi considers the golden eagle in Iran to be a sign of their knowledge and the reason is the frequent appearance of the eagle-like flag in the Shahnameh. Also, he considers the eagle to be the symbol of power, authority and kingship in Dari literature (Yahghi, 2017, 270-271). In many sources, sharp-toothed predatory birds such as eagle and falcon are interpreted with the same meaning and concept, and in Iranian mythology, they are also present in the motif of mythical birds such as Simurgh and Homa.

Bolkhari Ghehi, quoting from the book “Culture of Ancient Iran” by Pourdavoud, considers the eagle to be the same as the falcon and considers mythological and religious birds such as Sen, Simurgh, Homa and Vereghan to be eagles (Bolkhari Ghehi, 2019, 88-92). From another point of view, this motif was directly related to pre-Islamic religions, especially Mithraism. In Parthian and Sasanian art, the eagle was a symbol of the sun god [Mithra] (Dadvar & Mansouri, 2002, 110-110). Hatam also believes that in the ritual of resurrection Mehr [Mithra], in most artistic phenomena; The seal symbol is shown as an eagle (Hatam, 1995, 374-375).

• Double-headed eagle in ancient Iranian art

In a pottery from Tal Bakun, which dates back to the beginning of the 4th millennium BC (Fig. 1), there is an image of a two-headed bird depicted with open and shoulder-like wings. It turned out that the bird is an eagle.

The artist has been able to creatively draw the shape of the bird's head with a spiral twist and simplification, similar to a ram's horn, which is the characteristic of the display of bird's heads in Tal Bakon and Sialk pottery of the 4th millennium BC. Also, the shortness of the bird's tail emphasizes the characteristic of the bird as a hunter.

From another point of view, the heads can also be considered as a symbol of the ram's horn, but in the pottery of Tal Bakun, the drawing of the eagle is always from the front with two open wings like a comb, and the combined animal is not seen in these works. Of course, the artist could have been inspired by the horn in drawing his work. According to the authors' search in available domestic and foreign sources, this image is “the oldest double-headed eagle motif in Iranian civilization».

In the Jiroft civilization, two works with the image of a double-headed eagle can be seen. Fig. 2 is the closest form of the double-headed eagle in Mesopotamian civilization. This work is related to the third millennium BC and roughly coincides with



Fig. 1. Double-headed eagle, Tal Bakun, early 4th millennium BC.
Source: Potts, 1999, 85.

the oldest known inscription in the Mesopotamian civilization. The double-headed eagle holds two snakes in its talons and has them under its control. The symbolic meaning of this motif can be seen as the conflict between good and evil, and related to heaven and earth. In the belief of many ancient cultures, birds and snakes are both very close to each other and represent the separation of heaven and earth. In other words, the two directions are opposite (Lurker, 1983, 21). «Snakes are a symbol of the earth and birds are a symbol of the sky. These figures represent the main idea of the religion of the early farmers, namely, the connection between the goddess of the sky and the god of the earth» (Golan, 1991, 99). Cooper believes that the eagle and the snake together represent the completeness of the cosmic unity and the unity of spirit and matter (Cooper, 2007, 222). The figure of an eagle holding a snake in its claws or in its beak is a universal image; this image symbolizes the struggle of heavenly powers with infernal forces and the conflict between day and night, the sky, the earth and the sun (Esnaashari, 2022, 17 Cited in Beaucorpe, 1994). In their paper, Malek and Mokhtarian examined the motif of eagle and snake on the works of Jiroft and believe that the snake and bird (eagle) in the works of Jiroft are indicative of the centrality and power of the goddess in the creation of water and fertility (Malek & Mokhtarian, 2013, 178).

Also, in another image of Jiroft (Majidzadeh, 2003, 138), a double-headed eagle with closed wings and



Fig. 2. The battle between the two-headed eagle and the snake, Jiroft, 3rd millennium BC. Source: Shams Abadi, 2001, 150.

circles on the wing and body of the bird also shows Jiroft civilization. Majidzadeh has suggested that such dishes were used in religious ceremonies; because all of them were obtained from graves and coffins (Sehhat Manesh, 2019, 59 Cited in Majidzadeh, 1991, 68-69). Based on this, the motifs on these works show the connection of these motifs with burial rituals and the world after death, and from this point of view, this motif is a religious symbol. Also, Hossein Abadi, in his study of Jirafti motifs, believes that these motifs were formed based on the dominant beliefs in ancient society, such as the sanctity of animals and their role in human life (Hossein Abadi, 2015, 20).

In Peker's thesis, a Mesopotamian seal dated between 2450-2250 BC is proposed as the oldest double-headed eagle motif. In addition to the double-headed eagle, the figure of the god Ningirsu can also be seen in this seal. This motif has been proposed as a god-like symbol related to the king in this seal (Peker, 1989). About the use of the double-headed eagle on seals, Porada believes that the possible function of the two eagles on the seal could be to protect the bearer of the seal (Porada, 1993, 577).

In fig. 3, an engraved tablet is related to an Quiver plaque from Lorestan. This quiver plaque dates back to 1300 to 1100 BC and on it, the figure of four two-headed eagles with a person with wings can be seen. This mythological image can be compared with the character of Kay Kāvus in ancient Iranian mythological sources. In the Shahnameh, Kay



Fig. 3. four double-headed eagles on a tablet engraved on an Quiver plaque in Lorestan, 1300 to 1100 BC. Source: www.iranatlas.info.

Kāvus manages to fly with the help of four eagles that he ties to the bed. “The myth of Kay Kāvus’ flight is crystallized in the *Shahnameh* in addition to the Pahlavi, Avesta and historical sources of the Islamic period” (Parvan & Rezaee Dasht Arzhaneh, 2019, 7). Therefore, one of the sources of writing the *Shahnameh* can be found in the mythology of Lorestan tribes.

According to the story of the *Shahnameh*, after the war of Hamavaran and the rescue of Kay Kāvus, the demons create a forum to deceive him and put the idea of this trip on his head. Kay Kāvus also orders to make a bed for him so that he can fly to the sky. But after reaching the peak, the eagles get tired... (Ferdowsi, 2014, 2). The character of Nimrod in Babylon has been equated with Kay Kāvus (Parvan & Rezaei Dasht Arzhaneh, 2019).

Fig. 4 shows a double-headed eagle in the Parthian period, holding a rabbit in each claw. The eagle killing the rabbit is a sign of the victory of light over darkness and a great victory over the humble loser (Jobes, 1991, 82). This composition is also seen in the art of the Islamic period of Iran and Anatolia.

Alexander believes that such a composition, where the bird holds two animals in its claws, is derived from Hittite art. “Catching prey in the form of a double-headed eagle that takes two animals in its claws is one of the characteristics of Hittite art” (Alexander, 1989, 154).

Fig. 5 shows a double-headed eagle on a Sasanian plate. Also, the type of composition of this motif is in such a way that it is creatively placed according to the circular shape of the container and its empty space has been reduced to the minimum possible. The tail of the animal is drawn in the form of a fan, which is also seen in the works of the Islamic period, especially the Seljuks of Iran and Rome.

• Double-headed eagle in the art of the Islamic period

In the early Islamic period, this motif is often seen on Buyid dynasty textiles and its extension until the Seljuq period of Iran on metalwork-trays and plates. This motif of the Seljuk period in the Anatolian region was used with greater variety on coins, tiles and architecture.

For the first time, the double-headed eagle was seen in the Islamic period on the textiles of the Buyid dynasty period in Ray. Fig. 6 shows a double-headed eagle carrying a human being in the air and seems to be moving upwards. Pope believes that this person is the king. “The motif of the winged king on the bird has the concept of salvation” (Pope, 2001, 97). Similar to the combination of a human figure on the body of a bird-eagle seen in pre-Islamic Iranian works of art such as the Golden bowl of Hasanlu and Sassanid silver plate, it is probably the narrator of ancient stories. In the sample of the Sasanian period, Pope and Eckerman believe that this woman is Anahita (Pope & Eckerman, 2008, 1082). “This motif is very common in the depiction of Mesopotamian cylinder seals, especially of the Early Dynastic period” (Chariton, 2011, 4). In the myth of Etana, which has a Mesopotamian origin, Etana-the king of the Sumerian city of Kish flies



Fig. 4. A double-headed eagle holding a rabbit in each claw, Parthian period. Source: Peker, 1989, 60.



Fig. 5. A plate with a double-headed eagle motif, 5th and 6th century AD, Sassanid period, Reza Abbasi Museum. Source: Authors.



Fig. 6. Fabric, Buyid dynasty, Cleveland Museum of Art. Source: www.clevelandart.org.

to the sky-paradise with an eagle, which is similar to this figure. “Cylinder seals of the Akkadian period (2249-2390 BC) show a fragment in which Etana ascends to the sky on the back of an eagle “ (McCall, 1996: 86). In Mesopotamia, the oldest representation of this myth on Akkadian cylinder seals shows a man flying in the sky on eagle’s wings (Majidzadeh, 2003, 7 quoted from Frankfort, 1939, 138-139).

As seen, in the Parthian period, this figure has two rabbits in its claws (Fig. 6), but in the Buyid dynasty period, these animals in the claws become griffins. Farbod and Poorazizi, in their paper, mentions two double-headed eagle motifs on the fabrics of the Almohad Caliphate and Almoravid dynasty of Spain, and considers them influenced by early Islamic textile art, including Buyid dynasty, which is a continuation of the Iranian art of the Sassanid era (Farbod & Poorazizi, 2017, 100). Also, on the head of these eagles, a plant form can be seen, which is similar to the pre-Islamic eagle motif, such as the Sassanid period dish (Fig. 5).

«Another silk related to the Buyid dynasty with double-headed eagles as a symbol and a human figure with the inscription “May the life of Amir al-Mu’minin be long, and the best time is in the duration of his government”, the theme is taken from a hymn called Khalifa al-Mutawakkul (861-846 AD) (McDowell, 1995, 157). The human figure could refer to the caliph, who is supported by an eagle as a symbol of spiritual power—perhaps God. Also, these texts, written in praise of the Caliph and ruler of the time, reveal the connection of this motif with royal concepts in the Islamic period.

«Another piece from this era [Buyid dynasty], with an eagle motif in a square frame with the inscription “This is the tomb of a poor and needy person who needs the mercy of God... O my Lord, have mercy on me...” link It reveals the motif of this bird in the world after death” (Rouhfar, 2001, 24).

Fig. 7 shows the double-headed eagle on a plate

belonging to the Seljuk period, which is kept in the Azarbaijan Museum. The pictorial characteristics of this motif, such as the scale-like wings, are similar to the Sample of the Sassanid period, which indicates the continuation of the features of pre-Islamic art in the Islamic era.

In Fig. 8, it shows double-headed eagle on a metal work related to the period of 1200-1300 AD related to the Seljuks. The composition of the work shows the continuation of the drawing characteristics of buyid dynasty textile works. The beasts in the eagle's claws are not precisely identified, but they seem to have human figures or human heads. There is a circle around the animal's neck, which is reminiscent of a winged ring; it was a sacred symbol in ancient civilizations including Iran, Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt, and therefore, this bird has been included among the sacred birds. This image can be matched with Khvarenah's characteristics in ancient Iran. Faravahar [Farre Kiyâni] is shown in the Avesta as a bird called Vereghan, which is of the family of eagle, falcon or hawk. Achaemenid kings introduced themselves as God's manifestation on earth by using this motif in flags (Yahghi, 2017, 847). Another manifestation of "Khvarenah" is the ring or wheel of time, which is derived from the appearance of the sun and the rotation of the sky and the wheel of time (Jafari, 2002, 148). Ramadan Uykur believes that the eagle's companionship and the motif of the sun are related to Islamic astrology. The eagle constellation is one of the symbols of Aries, and since Aries is the peak of the sun, the eagle is the peak of the sun (Uykur, 2013, 153).

Fig. 9 shows a double-headed eagle on a tray from northwestern Iran in the late 13th century AD, which is among the Islamic motifs.

This combination of two-headed eagle and plant branches, in addition to the aesthetic aspect, can be related to mythological birds with plants in pre-Islamic-Zoroastrian and Islamic religion and literature. According to the ancient Iranian texts,



Fig. 7. Plate, Seljuk period, Azerbaijan Museum. Photo: Fateme Asl Sarirai.



Fig. 8. Metal work, Iran or Iraq, 1200-1300 AD, Department of Islamic Art, Louvre Museum. Source: <https://collections.louvre.fr>.

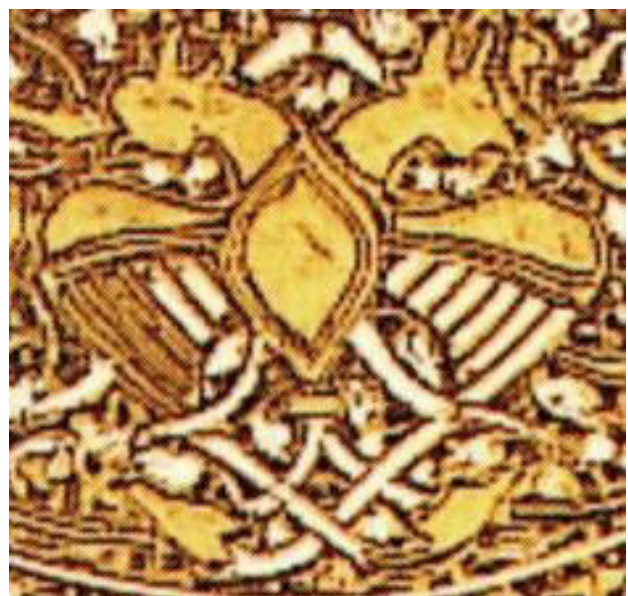


Fig. 9. Tray, northwestern Iran, late 13th century AD, British Museum, London. Source: <http://www.hubert-herald.nl>.

especially the Avesta, this motif can be considered the same as the mythological Simurgh. “The ancient presence of Simurgh in Iranian thought dates back to the period of emergence of Zoroastrian thought in Iran” (Bolkhari Ghehi, 2019, 78). «In the first text that mentions him as Sen, he has a nest on top of a tree and spreads the seed of life in existence with his flight” (ibid., 78). “Traces of this mythical bird can be found in Avestan and Pahlavi texts; both as a perching bird and as a high-ranking sage in Zoroastrian wisdom. The original pronunciation of the word Simurgh in Avesta is “Morghu se e neh“, in Pahlavi it is “Sen Moru“ and “Se neh Moruk“ and in some cases in Persian language it is “Sirang“, which the Orientalists have translated into eagle and falcon” (ibid., 77). In Avesta, it is a bird with open wings that carries the seeds of all plants and nests on a tree called “Gaokerena”. “Simurgh has a nest on top of such a tree according to the Avestan term; A tree that carries and is pregnant with all plant existence in the universe and is interpreted as a tree in Islamic culture” (ibid., 85).

This bird is called Vereghan in Avesta. “Giving feathers to a person, which is attributed to Simurgh in the Shahnameh, was attributed to another bird called Vereghan in the Avesta...” (ibid., 88). “... there is no doubt that the eagle is a hunting fowl of the falcon and falcon genus, or an eagle, which is a particularly powerful bird, and in ancient Iran, the eagle was the symbol of the kingdom, and later this bird became a symbol of the authority of the Romans... In the Shahnameh, the flag is repeatedly mentioned the eagle of Iran is mentioned” (Pourdavoud, 1968, 317). At the same time as the Seljuks in Iran and Anatolia, the eagle motif with a similar combination can also be seen in Syria, Egypt and Spain.

Table 1 shows the evolution of the motif of the double-headed eagle in the region of Iran and Anatolia. The number of motifs is not mentioned in the text due to brevity and also the connection

with Anatolian art, but it has been investigated in the course of the research.




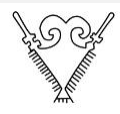
















Findings

Table 2 shows the findings of the research about the double-headed eagle in the two pre-Islamic and Islamic periods in Iran.

Conclusion

According to the studied documents, for the first time in history; The figure of the double-headed eagle has been observed in the land of Iran and in Tal bakun pottery at the beginning of the fourth millennium BC, and then it influenced the artworks of the geography of Iran’s neighbors, such as Mesopotamia, and as a result, it entered the art of the Hittites. In the Islamic period, this motif was seen for the first time on Buyid dynasty textiles, and the continuity of the form and content characteristics of this motif can be seen in Iranian art until the Seljuk period. The flight of a human figure with an eagle, the placement of animal motifs such as a griffin in the claws of this animal, and the enclosing of the figure in a circular form are among the characteristics influenced by pre-Islamic art in the Islamic period. In some images of the Islamic period, the double-headed eagle is associated with plant motifs, which can be matched with mythological birds in Iranian culture, such as Simurgh, Homa, and Vereghan. This motif in the Mesopotamia civilization is often depicted with an open and angry mouth, while in the pre-Islamic and Islamic art of Iran, it is often with the mouth closed and in a calm state. Various content factors have been influential in the display of this work in Iranian art, including mythology, religion, popular beliefs, and literature. The story of Kay Kāvus and Simurgh shows the presence of mythological characters in this motif. The common features of mythological birds such as Homa and Simurgh with the double-headed eagle show the presence of mythology in its drawing. Religion as

Table 1. The evolution of the double-headed eagle in the region of Iran and Anatolia. Source: Authors.

Figure	Linear figure	Type of work	period	Spatial range	Source	Description
		pottery	Early 4th millennium B.C	Tal Bakun, Shiraz	potts, 1999, 85	The eagle figure in the pottery of Tal Bakun is carved in such a way that features such as jagged wings and triangular tail are the characteristics of the oldest double-headed eagle figure in Iran.
		pottery	Early 4th millennium B.C	Tal Bakun, Shiraz	potts, 1999, 85	This bird is the first double-headed eagle in the world. The shape of the head could have been influenced by the ram's horn.
		Chlorite stone	Third millennium B.C	Jiroft	Shams Abadi, 2001, 150	The battle between the eagle and the snake represents the battle between the forces of nature-heaven and earth.
		Chlorite stone	Third millennium B.C	Jiroft	Majidzadeh, 2003, 138	A double-headed eagle with closed wings and circles are drawn on the wings and body of the bird.
		Seal	۲۲۵۰-۲۲۵۰ BC	Mesopotamia	Peker, 1989, pic 8	Part of a seal from Mesopotamia, a double-headed eagle with the god Ningirsu. This motif is presented as a god-like symbol related to the king in this seal.
		Seal	۱۵۵۰ BC	Cappadocia	Peker, 1989, 11a	The oldest double-headed eagle motif in the Anatolian region, related to the Hittites
		Axe	Late third millennium to early second millennium B.C	Afghanistan	The Metropolitan Museum of Art, www.metmuseum.org	There is a figure of a composite beast with two eagle heads in two different directions, fighting a boar and a winged lion. The website of the Metropolitan Museum says about it: "The idea of this heroic creature with a bird's head probably came from the west of Iran".
		Seal	۱۷th century B.C	Kol Tepe, Bogazkoy, Türkiye	Chariton, 2011, 6	The lower pictorial motif is a decorative pattern related to the Hittite civilization.
		Quiver plaque	1300-1100 BC	Lorestan	https://www.iranatl.as.in	Four double-headed eagles on a tablet engraved on the Quiver plaque are reminiscent of ancient mythology such as the story of Kay Kāvus and the journey to the sky in ancient texts, especially the Shahnameh.
		Cylindrical seal	Late Kassite period	Place of production: Near East	Ashmolean Museum London, https://collections.ashmolean.org/	The characteristics of this seal are reminiscent of the depictions of Susa and Mesopotamia seals. About the use of the double-headed eagle on seals, Porada believes that "the possible function of the two eagles on the seal could be to protect the bearer of the seal" (Porada 1993, 577).

Rest of table 1.



















Figure	Linear figure	Type of work	period	Spatial range	Source	Description
		-	Parthian period	-	Peker, 1989, 60	A double-headed eagle holding a rabbit in each claw.
		Silver plate	4th and 6th centuries Sasanian period	-	Reza Abbasi Museum	Creative composition suitable for the circular shape of the container and minimal empty space
		Textile	Buyid dynasty	Ray	Cleveland Museum of Art, www.clevelandart.org	Related to ancient stories such as the myth of Etana originating from Mesopotamia. The figure of a beast in the claws of a beast has become a griffin. The content of the work is related to Caliph.
		Plate	Seljuk period	-	Azerbaijan Museum, photographer: Fatemeh	The visual features of this motif are similar to the Sassanid period plate, and the artist probably drew inspiration from the Sassanid period work.
		Metalwork - probably for decorating	1300-1400 AD	Iran or Iraq	Department of Islamic Art of the Louvre Museum,	The ring around the animal's neck, reminiscent of the winged ring, was a sacred symbol in ancient civilizations, including Iran (Fravashi), Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt.
		Coin	Rukn al-Din Seljuq period. 1193 AD (Seljuqs of Rome)	Anatolia region	https://odyssey-us-numismatique.com	The motif of this eagle is enclosed in a circle, as in the Sassanid period
		Tile	Seljuk period, Alaeddin Kicbad I, 1220-1237 AD	Konya	https://www.pbase.com/	On the animal's body, the word «السلطان» "Al-Sultan" can be seen, which was the word used for the Seljuk kings.
		Metal tray	Seljuk period Late 13th century	Northwest of Iran	British Museum, London. http://www.b	The combination of plant motifs with the eagle is a decorative form on the head similar to the motif of the Sassanid period.
		The facade of Diurighi Mosque	14-15 AD (Seljuqs of Rome)	Eastern Anatolia	Peker, 1989: pic 120a	Peker, in his thesis, believes that this motif is related to the Simurgh, which has the seeds of creatures in its beak (Peker, 1989).

Table 2. Factors affecting the drawing of the double-headed eagle in Iranian art from the pre-Islamic period to the early Islamic period (Seljuq).
Source: Authors.

Factors	Pre-Islamic	Islamic
Mythology	A symbol of mythological birds such as Homa and Simurgh	Simurgh symbol in Shahnameh
Religion	The eagle is the symbol of Mithras in the religion of Mithraism and the symbol of Vereghan - a sacred bird in the Avesta	The ring around the neck of the Seljuk bird, reminiscent of the symbol of Khvarenah in Fravashi in ancient Iranian art
	The symbol of the burial ritual and the world after death and related to the concepts of immortality and salvation	The presence of this motif along with sentences about death in textiles shows the connection of this motif with life after death
Popular beliefs	Belief in the king and presence as a royal symbol on the seals of this period	The presence of the double-headed eagle on the textiles attributed to the kings shows the connection of this motif with this class. Appearing on the flag of the Seljuk kings of Rome
	The patron and protector of the king and the people holding the seal with the figure of a double-headed eagle	The supporter and protector of the Caliph as God's successor on earth
Literature	In ancient literature, the eagle was a symbol of power, Khvarenah, authority and kingship. Presence in the story of Kay Kāvus in Pahlavi and Avesta texts	Appearing in Shahnameh as Simuorgh and the story of Kay Kāvus and Eagles

a powerful factor in drawing this motif has been mentioned. The presence of sacred symbols of ancient religions of pre-Islamic Iran, such as Mithra, Vereghan and Fravashi, indicates these religious factors. The presence of this motif on works related to burial rituals and belief in immortality and the world after death, introduces it as a religious motif. Belief in the king as the possessor of spiritual and material power - domination over the West and the East - can be seen as a result of popular thoughts and beliefs. The symbolic form of this motif and its presence in ancient stories such as Kay Kāvus in Pahlavi and Avesta texts and, accordingly, in the literary sources of the Islamic period, especially the Shahnameh, represent the presence of literature as a powerful factor in depicting this motif.

Acknowledgment

We would like to express our gratitude to Mrs. Fatemeh Asl Sarirai, the head and property trustee of the Azarbaijan Museum, who collaborated in the preparation of the image and information related to

the motif of the two-headed eagle in the Azerbaijan Museum.

Endnotes

1. The Hittites were one of the first groups that migrated from the Indo-European mainland and settled in what is now Boğazköy in north-central Turkey in the second millennium BC and established their government.
2. Tal Bakun is located in Fars province, near Persepolis, and the most famous works of this region are related to the engraved pottery that belongs to the 4th and 3rd millennium BC. The motifs of these pottery are stylized and summarized and are very valuable from an artistic point of view.
3. <https://www.academia.edu/>
4. <https://www.researchgate.net/>
5. Yazili Kaya was the capital of the Hittite Empire in the second millennium BC, which is located in the Churum province of Turkey today.

References list

- Alexander, R. L. (1986). *The Sculpture and Sculptors of Yazilikaya*. Newark: University of Delaware Press.
- Beaucorps, M. (1994). *Les symboles vivants*. Tehran: Markaz.
- Bolkhari ghahi, H. (2019). Simorgh Avestaei, Simorgh Ishraghi (a study on the historical etymology of "Simorgh" in Islamic-Iranian wisdom). *Tarikh-e Falsafe (History of Philosophy)*, 10(2), 77-98.
- Chariton, J. D. (2008). *Function of the Double-Headed*

Eagle at Yazilikaya. B.A of Arts in Archaeological Studies. Madison: University of Wisconsin.

- Chariton, J. D. (2011). "The Mesopotamian Origins of the Hittite Double-Headed Eagle". *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research*, (14), 1–13.
- Cooper, J. C. (2007). *Illustrated culture of traditional symbols*. Tehran: Farshad.
- Dadvar, A. & Mansouri, E. (2002). *An introduction to the myths and symbols of India in ancient times*. Tehran: Al-Zahra University.
- Esnaashari, A. (2022). Comparative study on the formology and symbolism of bird motifs on ancient pottery and Islamic period pottery in Iran. *Journal of Iranian Handicrafts Studies*, 4 (2), 163-177.
- Farbod, F. & Poorazizi, S. (2017). The impact of Persian textiles of Buyid and Seljuk Eras on Islamic Spain textiles (Case Study: Almoravids & Almoheds Periods). *Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba (Journal of Fine Arts: Visual Arts)*, 22 (2), 89-102.
- Ferdowsi, A. (1393). *Shahnameh. By the effort of Jalal Khaleghi Mutal*, vol. 7. Tehran: Center for the Great Islamic Encyclopedia.
- Frankfort, H. (1939). *Cylinder Seals: a documentary essay on the art and religion of the ancient Near East*. London: Macmillan.
- Göksu, E. (2016). Çift başlı kartal ve selçuklular. *Selçuk üniversitesi selçuklu araştırmaları dergisi*, (5), 117-141.
- Golan, A. (2003). *Prehistoric religion: mythology, symbolism*. Jerusalem: Ariel Golan.
- Hadidi, E., Dadvar, A. & Akbari, A. (2009). Mystical thought of Eagle motif in Ancient Iran and its effect on some of products. *Naghshmayeh (Semi-annual of Visual Arts)*, (2), 7-20.
- Hatem, Gh. A. (1995). Patterns and Symbols in Ancient Iranian Pottery. *Honar (Art Quarterly)*, (28), 355-378.
- Hossein Abadi, Z. (2016). Animal motifs and "hybrid animals" in the stone relics of Jiroft civilization. *Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba (Journal of Fine Arts: Visual Arts)*, 21 (1), 9-21.
- İlden, S. (2012). Türk ikonografisinde kartal motifi. Problems of Engineering Graphic and Professional Education. *Scientific Pedagogical Journal*, (15), 42-53.
- Jafari, S. (2002). Farrah's and its symbols in Sasanian art. *Ketabe Mahe Honar*, (45&46), 148-198.
- Jobes, G. (1991). *Symbols, first book, animals*. Tehran: Motarjem.
- Khosravi, E. (2012). Investigating motif and forms of birds in ancient Iranian art. *Naghshmayeh (Semi-annual of Visual Arts)*, 5 (11), 69-84.
- Lurker, M. (1983). *Adler und Schlange Tiersymbolik im Glauben und Weltbild der Völker*. Tübingen: Wunderlich.
- Majidzadeh, Y. (2003). *Jiroft, the oldest civilization of the East*. Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.
- Malek, M. & Mokhtarian, B. (2013). Iconography of the symbol of eagle and snake in the works of Jiroft (3rd millennium BC). *Iranian Journal of Anthropology*, 10 (17), 163-195.
- McCall, H. (1996). *Myths of Mesopotamia*. Tehran: Markaz.
- McDowell, E. (1995). *"Textile" in Iranian arts*. Tehran: Farzan.
- Özel, N. (2018). GRAFİK BİR SEMBOL OLARAK ANADOLU SELÇUKLULARINDA ÇİFT BAŞLI Kartal. *Turkish Online Journal of Design Art and Communication*, 8 (3), 551-559.
- Özgan, R. (2020). Antik Çağ'dan Günümüze Çift Başlı Kartal: Anlamı, Yorumu ve Propagandası Double-Headed Eagle from Antiquity to Present: Its Meaning, Interpretation and Propaganda. *Arkhaia Anatolika*, (97).
- Parvan, H. & Rezaee Dasht Arzheneh, M. (2019). A comparative-analytic survey of flight myths (Kaykavos, Nimrod, Wu.i, Ikaros, Etane). *The Journal of Epicliterature*, 15 (1), 93-118.
- Peker, A. (1989). *Uzay. The Double-Headed Eagle of the Seljuks: A Historical Study* (Unpublished M.A thesis in Art history). İstanbul: Boğaziçi University.
- Pope, A. & Ackerman, P. (2008). *A survey of Persian art, from prehistoric times to the present*, Vol. 6. Tehran: Elmi Farhangi pub.
- Pope, A. (2001). *Masterpieces of Persian art*. Tehran: Elmi Farhangi pub.
- Popović, B. (2009). Imperial Usage of Zoomorphic Motifs on Textiles: the Two-Headed Eagle and the Lion in Circles and Between Crosses in the Late Byzantine Period. *IKON, Journal of Iconographic Studies*, (2), 127-136
- Porada, E. (1993). Why Cylinder Seals? Engraved Cylindrical Seal Stones of the Ancient Near East. Fourth to First Millennium B.C. *The Art Bulletin*, (4), 563–582.
- Potts, D. T. (1999). *The Archaeology of Elam: Formation and Transformation of an Ancient Iranian State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pourdavoud, E. (1968). *Yashtha*. Vol. 1 & 2. Tehran: Tahoori
- Prada, E. (2004). *The Art of ancient Iran*. Tehran: Tehran University Press.
- Roohfar, Z. (2001). *A look at textile weaving in the Islamic era*. Tehran: Iran's Cultural Heritage Organization in collaboration with Samt Publications.
- Sehhat Manesh, R. (2019). A Totemic Study of Zoomorphic Motifs in the Civilization of the Halirood District of Jiroft (Third Millennium B.C.). *Pazhoheshha-ye Bastan shenasi Iran*, 9 (20), 55-74.
- Shams Abadi, S. (2001). *A comparative study of the myth of the master of animals in Lorestan metalwork art and Jiraft stoneware* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Sistan and Baluchistan, Sistan and

Baluchistan, Iran.

- Uykur, R. (2013). Artuklu Türkmenleri'nin Sikkelerinde Mitolojik Bir Yaratık: "Çift Başlı Kartal". *Seleucia*, (3), 137-158.

- Yahaghi, M. J. (2017). *Culture of myths and stories in Persian literature*. Tehran: Farhange Moasser.

COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author (s), with publication rights granted to the journal of art & civilization of the orient. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Motevalli, M.; Ghazizadeh, Kh. & Afshari, M. (2024). Retrieving the Motif and Evolution of the Double-Headed Eagle in Iranian art from Ancient to Seljuk Period. *Journal of Art & Civilization of the Orient*, 12(43), 20-33.

DOI: 10.22034/JACO.2023.409141.1336

URL: https://www.jaco-sj.com/article_189372.html?lang=en

