

## SHAPES THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL KEY FOR KNOWING UNKNOWN

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### ABSTRACT

*Nowadays is the period of communication. The art separate from its origin or belonging each nation or territory, is a world of communication too. In fact the art is a superhighway of interfacing different sciences and knowledge, various civilizations and cultures. Joining different parts of societies to each other such as different parts of body is another definition of art. But where we can find the footprint of art with its marvelous characteristics which modify cultures or anthropological roots? The clear description of art is formed by form and shape. Form is the surface of the world of art. At times the artist's wants to convey special concept by form. Then meaning will be a hide section of artistic work. The tree in art shows the sample of our statement. A tree more than its common meaning in different countries, consist a kind of infrastructural layer in itself. For example we have different shapes of tree in Iranian handmade carpets. At time the artist wants to present a tree of life and other times he/she decides to talk about inferno tree such as a symbol of cultural anthropological matter in his/her societies. Then it will be correct to say: this is a key to know what is familiar through no familiar aspects of life. The shapes have strangeness in themselves. In this way the shapes have great energy in different layers in Iranian Arts, they are such as a key to know civilization, cultures, histories and nations. In this article the writer wants to say anthropological sources of pictorial artistic works through her near ten years experimental knowledge by conceptual studies. The method of research is based on library foundation and going to the different districts of Iran. The conclusion can be generalized to each nation.*

**Keywords:** *shape and meaning, artistic works, anthropological roots.*

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### 1. Preface

Speaking of the roots, no matter in what fields or which feature of sciences, is a kind of establishing the columns of powerful house. That is a type of deep recognition. In art language this word contains aesthetical point of artistic work. Since for knowing the origins we must create a relation between concept and meaning of designs at one hand and in another hand we have surface or shapes. In this case we must consider that according to aesthetical attitude the patterns, designs and motifs have such this characteristic to convey different meaning by their shapes. The many first concept of them wake up from marvelous believe. Among those put mythical behaviors, the easy way of people life in different parts of the worlds or customs which can shape culture, magic, religion and etc. In each kind of these categorize according to the main points of believes that must convey, shapes, will be made. This is a path for showing beauties by attitudes of our life. Using of imagination, inspiration and intuition will form a form of silent conversational language in itself. By exact looking toward such these works our eyes have this ability to making relation with the history and different aspects of it. From another vision we can say the artistic works are a reflection

toward human perception of existed nature rules. What we see by raw artistic material in fact is a description of nature phenomenon according to artist's view. Then this work can be a tradition of civilization and have a capability to convey in the mind of each person from this generation to that. Since the writer of this article is a researcher of designs in the field of Iranian Handmade Carpets, then the samples are choosing more from the Iranian carpets here.

## **2. Design classification as whole:**

Design is tangible part of the work of art. Different features of community life such as psychological, sociological, anthropological, religious bases can be followed by surveying designs. The function of design has two features in oriental arts. The one is pure decoration and the second is conceptual characteristic of it more than what we see at first glance. Human shapes, animal shapes, vegetarian shapes, inanimate design and nymph shapes are the whole main elements designing. Each of them consists of sub groups which used in various works. For example in human figure we have natural, abstract and combine shapes. Griffon is a combination of human and animal shapes. This kind of classification is the same as the classification of other animal and botanical groups. The sky and the earth are examples for inanimate group of designs. Finally Nymph shapes consist of Jinn, souls, angel and other motive (Daryaie, 2006, 81). This classification gives us scales for surveying. A lot of designs and patterns are existed in the world that have used to different cultures and different countries. In fact design is a kind of pictorial culture of the community in form of shape.

### **2.1 Preliminary shapes**

The ancient time, a date about third millennium B.C, give us good clue for finding the roots of early shapes. The human learned to imitate from nature since the nature is the biggest and the first source for men to learn. Before creating pictorial calligraphy which is the preliminary pattern for man's inscription, they painted on mountain's walls and various materials to convey their concepts, establish communication and make history for us. These are the most ancient designs. By them we can see the daily life of the people in that period such as a mirror. For example hunting scenes is one of the first designs which show the secret of survival human being in the world and this picture till know is one of the main groups of carpet producing in Iran. This is the process of design development. Shapes became to have bilateral function, not for their daily life but for their spiritual manners. For instance they were shown a picture of wild animal but this was not fundamental goal for them. They wanted to ask help by animal's power. Then they were depicted it in their painting and supposed that special animal is a symbol for their willing against powerful energy of the nature that could be destroyed their life. Now if they showed boar in their painting, it referred to not only an animal whose meat is important in their life but also boar has a meaning of ritual power for them to prevailing upon the great phenomenon of nature. Boar is one of the animals which till this time we can find the picture of it in carpets especially the one kind of tribal carpets. But it is important to say during all decades the meaning of this animal keep the first meaning and also other concepts and stories changed it to a mythical approach meaning. By accepting this we can add the meaning of the earth's fertility and then an imagination of the enemies of goddesses. Of course in different cultures and different countries we can talk about many attitudes for this symbolic animal. One of them is the symbol of victory against powerful enemy in Iran and by the text of Yashtha in Avesta, the sacred book of Zoroastrian, it is the symbol of Bahram god (Varasraghnah), and he is the killer of the enemy (Coyajee, 2004, 258).

Pottery is one of the main materials for surveying the shapes. For example we can observe preliminary mountain shape on potteries. At the early times Mountains regarded symbols for

protecting, the source of life, power of energy, sign for fertility and abundant and roots of life (pope, Wonders of Iranian Arts, 5).

Horns of animal as well as runner dogs and circles are the symbols for rain. Circle is the sign for moon, which itself is a sign for cultivation and fertility too (Dorant, 1983, p.92)

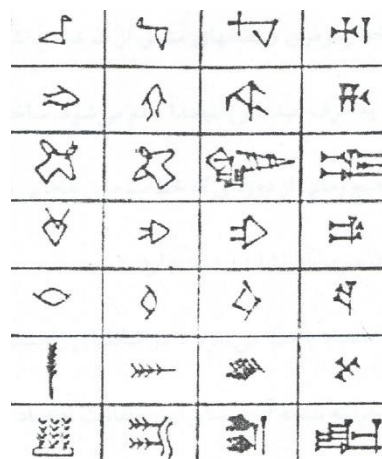
One another shape to show praying for rain, fertility, the earth, and four elements of existence is Malti Cross. It is so ancient symbol such as swastika with more than five millennium years old (Samadi, 1977, p 20).



Malti cross shape, comb bird, grain and water channel from pottery of Illamid period

Writing opens the world history for us. Since the story of writhing has been shaped and saved by inscription. At the time of history or at the time of the third millennium BC the first type of writing calligraphy was shaped. The concept of writing is the same till now because shapes and alphabets must convey meaning directly. The thought of choosing and making shapes in a way that they remind us their equal meaning in nature is the duty of designs in every time. By comparing the elements of pictograph process in the history of making calligraphy the similarities of the roots of a few designs show themselves. These are the minds of ancient people who delivered us their history by using these symbols and signs

Among these shapes it will be precious to put our note in star, mountain, plant, water shapes which the real motives of them can be use in modern oriental rugs.



A) Chaharmahal carpet, Iran B) Ten pictorial shapes with cuneiforms words, Gelb, study of writing, p 70

### 2.3 Bird and Bird- Head Design

This design is the symbol of humidity, rain, prayer for rain. Also a couple of birds on both sides of the tree of life are the symbol for eternity and immortality. At time they appeared alone. In this way they are conveying, a symbol of removing evil forces and considered as a shelter against wicked eye.

Head birds at interconnected chains of positive and negative shapes, are the request for rain, for having fertile lands for productivity and abundance of cultivation and livestock.



7.16 & 7.17 Luristan, 5ft 4in × 7ft 8in (163cm × 234cm), and detail; late nineteenth century.



Luri carpet of Iran and detail of it, with head bird motif, ref: Opie, Tribal rugs

Actually, more motifs and designs bear multilateral and multi-attractive concepts. They are just like old calligraphy, which in many occasions, for reaching to their concept, they need to be deciphered.

Therefore, using any celibacy, generating limbs, and limbs elimination show the artists' imaginal feature for designing. The artist in this way is a mirror of the necessities of his society and adroitly mixes his mental understandings with these public needs and requirements, to depict a sketch which bears the main concept on the heart of her/ his work.

Maybe we see two birds a rounding one tree in several manners. The tree is the tree of life but two birds in both sides of it depicting to protecting of the tree of life. This is so ancient motif that the roots of it belong to Mesopotamian arts. It is possible too to see other animals such as two horses or two lions or even two human figures around the tree

#### 2.4 Comb bird

Comb birds are one of the ancient motifs in artistic works and the age of them came back to before third millennium BC. The first samples of them in Iran have been pictured on Shusha, Giyan, Hasanlu, Marlik potteries. In carpets we observe them in easiest form of painting.

Protecting against devil forces and causing fertility and rain for the people are two conceptual meaning of them.

"The names of these shapes were originated from the nature and functional life of the people" (Thompson, 1993, 155) and have a direct relation with the role of their meaning towards people life.



Lori carpet of Iran and detail of it, showing the comb bird, ref: Opie, Tribal rugs

## 2.5 Fish design

Fish design at the end of Timurid period (9<sup>th</sup> century of lunar year) and during Safavid era has been widely used. Nowadays, in most geographic areas of Iran this shape is used in art production.

Basis of Herati designs are two or four bent leaves surrounding a flower at centre. The central flowers are usually designed as lotus or Shahabbasi flowers, and the leaves are reminders of fish.

Many researchers think that the emergence of this design relates to Mithraism rituals in Iran. Even the seventh month of Iran's solar year, Mehr, reminds Mitra and originated from it. There are a custom with the name of Mehregan in Zoroastrians believes which has a near relationship with the tail of Mithraism. Fish design, refers to the birth of Mehr from water. The mother of troth with the symbol of lotus is impregnated by water and gives birth to Mitra. Symbolic shape for this happening is fish. Both lotus and fish connect to water and sun. In this myth, Mitra by his intelligence fights with an evil bison, runs life on the Earth, and eventually after finishing his mission ascends to heaven.

## 2.6 Tree and plant design

The tree design is one of the main designs used in Iranian arts in various forms. The tree is used in different fields of Iranian arts in the form of Tree Vase design, Garden design, and prayer design.

Dispersion of design application and its long-term validity has caused the variety and multiplicity of it in different arts. Tree design which means immortality, is the origin of youth and the source of life.

Kerman Tree-Sabzikar not only reminds the futurity and the everlasting paradise, but also is a fresh garden full of flowers and plants and the green life which is running for mankind in this world.

One of the sketches which originated from tree designs is Boteh design. For this Iranian sketch various meanings are declared. One of them is embodiment of bent cypress by the wind, one of the most beautiful concepts.

Vase design has a vast relation with the earth of mother and the God of productivity, Birth of the earth and returning to it. This is a circle of nature giving life to life elements such as trees and mankind, which from the un-depreciable earth, glows as a symbol of a vase full of flowers. The earth is not always a symbol of life. Sometimes it is the lady of death. Death is similar to a seed that is cultivated in the earth, in order to grow plants from it. The earth is a sign of productivity and a new creation.

Role of Cedar motif among different trees is so great in Iranian ornamentation works. This is very old design with concept of cosmic tree and such this function caused its continuous use till now. Then the sacred situation of this kind of tree make role of the tree of life to it. It is such as a bridge between this world and the final world after death. Against the tree of life the tree of inferno or talking tree was designed on various materials for artistic works. The samples of these trees are limited but the concept of those is only a guess. There is not any exact and clear concept for this shape in a way that all researchers accepted that.



A) Tabriz Carpet, Iran, Inferno tree, ref: Hali, 2005, 35

B) Tabriz Carpet, 20 century, ref: The dream of paradise, v2

Anthropological artistic sample:

Tree has different conceptual meaning in different parts of the world. In Iran we are facing with two main deep explanation of tree in artistic work which consists of a clear and direct sign to anthropological clues of Iranian people. The tree has a great situation in believe of the people in the east too. At times it is a natural phenomenon such as the human body which needs atmosphere, water and soil for growing. By this shape, the existence of a tree is similar to human being. By this meaning in most countries of the world people call it the endless tree, the eternal plant, the tree of life, the sacred tree and so on (Parham, 1992, 225). But what is the meaning of this kind of pictorial tree in various fields of Iranian arts such as Iranian carpets?

For showing the better description it will be better to bring here pictorial samples. In one carpet from Tabriz – Iran we can see the design of cedar motif in the form of speaking tree in the middle. And at the top of the tree two peacocks are standing. This is a kind of metamorphic attitude toward the world. Those two animals are the symbol of knowledgeable crown at the top of the tree of immortality. In another words we can say this is a pictorial shape of anthropological cognition of the "sweetness of the life" (The dream of Paradise, 2004, 23). But another name for this special kind of tree design is the map of another world. Maybe after Timurid dynasty in Iran and with the flourishing of fine arts at this era, this type of pattern would be existed by Sufism in Tabriz (farshe dastbafte Iran, 2003, 100).

But on the contrary we have another pictorial and conceptual tree in artistic works of eastern countries with the name of vaq, inferno or speaking tree. This shape completely is against the tree of life. Such as the tree of existence the inferno tree is such as an open window to the existence of each human being. The animal heads are visible among the different parts of the tree stems. These symbolic heads are the sign for internal energy of individual.

### **3. Conclusion**

Art is such as a crossroad connection with all fields of life. Design in different arts also has a conjunction role with these fields. In fact bilateral language of design exists in art. These are social values of community which recognize culture. By understanding the tails belonging to each design, they will be more attractive for us. Cultural features and characteristics of the nation can be decoding by knowing about real meaning of them. At times the designer is the only one who knows the concept of design.

The quality of pattern and design reveal the thought of the artist for selecting the best way of composition. That is a kind of circle shape between independence and compulsion to case new sense of intuition, imagination and creation with nonstop spiritual manners. Mortality is the conclusion of such creation and has a direct affect on establishing culture and civilization of nation's history.

For artistic creation and for the case of everlasting artistic works, the artist needs to share spiritual manners during the process of activity. This is a kind of harmony between form and concept. Etymological roots of designs go back to very ancient time when different cultures were shaped. Since culture will shape believe behavior and the history of each nation. Also Magic, myth, anthropomorphism thought, metaphysic, religion are the most important elements which establish cultural behavior and history by the help of design.

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