

**EXTENDED  
ABSTRACT****Human Figure Iconology is Two Pieces of Textile from Sassanid Era  
(With Images of the King's Battle and the Tree of Life)**Nastaran Saberi <sup>1\*</sup> Ameneh Mafitabar <sup>2</sup>1. \* Master's Student in Textile and Fashion Design at Pars University, Tehran, Iran (corresponding author). [HYPERLINK](#)

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**Introduction**

Throughout centuries, artistic creations have represented the culture and beliefs of every ethnic group, becoming inseparable from their art history. What remains from the Sasanian era is of special significance because of the political, religious and economic events of the day, and interpreting them helps discover more of the secrets buried in the period. Motifs are the most prominent feature of Sasanian art. The fabrics remaining from the Sassanid period are an important source to study the motifs of this period. These fabrics include elements with broad structural, religious, and mythological concepts. Studies show that there are many basic approaches to literary and artistic studies, including the iconology approach which has a relatively special place. Studying art, especially textiles, and reading the motifs of fabrics through iconology can remove many ambiguities in this regard, because this method uses description and analysis to examine the motifs and elements of fabrics and identify their implicit meanings and the reasons for their coincidence. With this in mind, this article aims to delve deeper into the symbols and signs of the fabrics of the Sassanid period and analyze their semantic layers. Aiming to fulfil this objective, the present study seeks to answer this question: "What are the hidden and semantic layers of the human figures on the two pieces of textile from Sassanid Era with images of king's battle and tree of life, based on the iconological approach?" The hypothesis is that by exploring the superficial forms of the motifs of these two pieces of fabric and determining and interpreting the symbols, it is possible to come to their iconographic interpretation and identify at least some of the most meaningful symbolic meanings as a decorative element and a feature of Iranian art. Many studies have dealt with the motifs and symbols of the Sassanid period and the iconology approach. For example, Neda Akhavanaqdam (2017) studied the metal utensils of this period from an iconographic point of view, introducing symbols and discussing the motifs of hunting, ritual and court ceremonies in this period based on the metal art of the Sassanid era. An Introduction to Iconology by Nahid Abdi (2012) has described this approach and clarified the path of this theoretical study to the reader. This book can be a useful guide to the study of Sassanid motifs with this approach.

**Keyword:**Sassanid  
Iconology  
Textile  
Human Figures

## Methodology

This research is based on the theoretical framework of iconology–iconography and used a descriptive–analytical approach based on historical studies. Data were analyzed qualitatively and collected by observation and documentary (desk–based) method and its tool is summarized in the ID sheet. Therefore, the technical and conceptual characteristics of the themes used in Sasanian textiles were first identified and introduced and then the samples were examined, classified, and analyzed by a qualitative analysis method using the iconographic approach. The visual instances of this article were also selected through simple random sampling and two samples with images of Imperial War and the Tree of Life that had remained from the Sasanian era were described, analyzed, and interpreted, indicating their symbolic meanings.

## Findings

After a brief review of the iconography approach, this article describes the status of textile during the Sasanian period. It then relies on a developmental theory about the iconological interpretation of these textile motifs and explores two pieces of Sassanid fabric based on the dominant forms of that era. After review and exploring two pieces of Sassanid fabric, It shows that the purpose of producing these motifs is to induce concepts such as supernatural power and immortality for the royal force and the king himself, and the two pieces of fabric display Zoroastrian beliefs symbolically in order to legitimize sovereignty. Finally, the results are presented in a table below.



**Image 1**

Coptic textile fragment of legging  
Antinoe, 6–7th AD  
Musée des Tissus, France.  
source: URL 2



**Image 2**

Fragments of a Wall Hanging  
6–7th AD  
Benaki Museum Athens.  
source: Avarcalhkd, Fereydon & Javadi, Shohreh, 2017: 134

**Table 1 .** Symbols in two pieces of fabric under study . source : Authours

Symbol	Symbol	Inner meaning in Image 1	Inner meaning in Image 2
<b>King</b>	Manifestation of the god of victory, the supreme rule of the king	Displaying the reign and victory of the king	
<b>Warriors</b>	Support, conquest, victory	Displaying the victory and conquest of the king	Displaying support and victory
<b>King`s sword</b>	Symbol of unity, undefeatability, power, monarchy, and divine will	Displaying divine authority and will and the king`s great power	
<b>Perpendicularity of king`s sword</b>	Sublimity and spirituality	Displaying the king`s sublimity and spirituality	
<b>bow</b>	Sign of power	The symbol of power and cleansing of the land of evil	The symbol of power and cleansing of the land of evil
<b>Moving ribbon</b>	The symbol of royalty, the symbol of the divine power	The relationship of the king and the warriors with the heavenly and divine powers	The relationship of warriors with the heavenly and divine powers
<b>Horse</b>	Endurance, luck, sun turner, courage, power, horse transferring the dead`s soul	Sign of power, warriors` courage, power and speed; horse transferring the dead`s soul	Sign of power, warriors` courage, power and speed, sun turner
<b>Tree of life</b>	Growth, reproduction, fertility, immortality and life cycle		Immortality and life, God`s conquest of the devil
<b>Star</b>	Effect on plants` growth	Preventing the enemy from entering the land	Preventing the enemy from entering the land and contributing to plants` growth
<b>Circular form</b>	Sign of God and Sun	Representing further power	Representing further power
<b>Opened wing</b>	A symbol of the goddess Bahram, fertilizing forces,		Emphasizing the protection of the goddess Bahram, fertilizing forces
<b>Dog</b>	Sign of loyalty and the companion of the dead	Loyalty to the king and warriors and the companion of the dead at war	
<b>War</b>	Removing anarchy and achieving unity	Removing anarchy and achieving unity	
<b>Captives</b>	King`s great power	Displaying the king`s power and victory	
<b>Trumpet</b>	Sign of wish for reputation and magnificence	Announcing the king`s magnificence and superiority over the enemy or God`s conquest of the devil	

### Conclusion

In general, we can say that Sassanians, as a religious dynasty considering the King's relationship with God, gave meaning to artistic concepts and converted their art into a formal and court art. The Sassanian artist did not merely seek to create a realistic, ordinary human image and figure, nor did he seek to portray magnificent historical aspects. Therefore, each component of their art represents the culture, duty, legitimacy, firmness and fate. Most human images in Sasanian art convey the message that the King is God-chosen and responsible for human guidance. He actually reflects the image of gods and has legitimate power. The Sasanians were mainly involved in the creation of face, the image of the king, in certain cases, and their occasional portray of God and sacred beings was merely to legitimize the king.

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