
Analysis of the mythical figures in Hasanlu golden bowl (Iron Age) painting based on Gilbert Durand's night and day system approach

Abstract

Problem Definition: Hasanlu golden bowl painting is one of the original surviving arts of Hasanlu district, which reflects the attitudes and beliefs of human societies (Iron Age). In this work, the artist has portrayed Ahurian (good) against Ahrimanian (evil) concepts, and has created an image that has a positive or negative rating from this point of view. Looking at Hasanlu golden bowl painting from this perspective, is rooted in Gilbert Durand's mythological approach. He believes that mental images are divided into two systems, night and day. According to these systems, it is attempted here to answer the question that what is the dominant mythological approach in Hasanlu bowl.

Objective: The purpose of this study is to identify the mythological concepts of Iranian artistic elements with new perspectives.

Research Method: The present research has been conducted in a descriptive-analytical manner. The research data has been reviewed and analyzed using case method. The required information has been also collected in a library manner.

Results: The artist has illustrated the image of Hasanlu bowl using its imaginative forms and metaphysical power and with the help of mythology, positive individual themes and his society and at the same time, has depicted the negative themes. In contrast to the day system (sublime, light and separator), he has used the night one (falling, dark and animal features). Finally, the day system has been found to have a higher frequency compared to the day one in the images of Hasanlu golden bowl.

Keywords: Hasanlu golden bowl painting, Myth, Day and night systems, Gilbert Durand.

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Introduction

The origin and legitimacy of the imagination was known only in the field of art and literature for centuries, where there were talking about the dreams, fantasies and metaphors. However, the science and humanities, based on the definitions, have addressed the reality of life instead of the fantasies, waking instead of the dreams and human history instead of human memory. Because these areas and their corresponding concepts were not compatible with the rationality of modern human being and the empirical nature of the scientific thought, so that the fundamental attention to the imagination process in the social life emerged following the unconscious mind discovery in psychology and had a prominent effect on all areas of human knowledge (Shariati, 2007, 89). The discovery of the unconscious mind by psychology, made the field of sociology, and consequently anthropology, aware of the imagination process in social life, and also made them aware of the existence of a real foundation of the collective spirit (Manovich, 2001, 58). Painting is an art which can be used to display the attitudes and beliefs of the human societies. The artist seeks to enliven the mental images, because they can reveal the hidden intentions in the unconscious minds of the societies. A clear example of this can be observed in Hasanlu golden bowl painting belonging to the Iron Age. This painting is considered as one of the first phenomena of Iranian art which is full of national themes. All the elements depicted in this painting are rooted in archetypes. These archetypes can be explored using mythological approach of Gilbert Durand. Employing the theory of his professors Jung and Bashlar, and using sciences such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology, Durand proposed theories, one of which was the theory of the night and day pems. He believed that every art contains elements of the two poles of Ahurian and Daevian. The presence of the elements of imagination, myth and symbolism in Hasanlu golden bowl painting has caused the use of Durand's theory in conducting the present study. Benefiting from Durand's theory, the present article tries to show how the artist overcomes the negative themes in the artistic narrative by using positive themes and symbols in Hasanlu golden bowl painting. To achieve this goal, the following questions are raised: Are the imaginary elements visible in Hasanlu golden bowl painting? If the answer is yes, which system has the most obvious elements, according to Durand's theory of the night and day system? The present study seeks to answer these questions according to Durand's theory of the night and day system. According to the mentioned topics, the artist aimed to display his beliefs and the societies of that time on Hasanlu golden bowl and has used positive elements and symbols in contrast to negative one while to achieve this goal.

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Research Method

Based on Gilbert Durand's approach of the night and day system, the present study has examined Hasanlu golden bowl painting in a descriptive-analytical manner. The required information has been collected through library resources. In examining the case study of Hasanlu golden bowl painting, an attempt has been made to use authentic and first-rate artworks.

Research Background

Although, no research has been conducted on the analysis of the mythical forms in Hasanlu golden bowl painting (Iron Age) based on the night and day system of Durand's imaginations, many articles have been published concerning with the myth, Durand's theory and Hasanlu golden bowl, which largely help the present authors in this research. Eliade (1983) in his books entitled "Aspects of the myth" and "The myth of the eternal return" (2005), has addressed various topics associated with the mythology. Regarding the night and day system of Gilbert Durand, Abbasi (2002) discussed the night and day system from Durand's point of view. Regarding Hasanlu golden bowl, Khoakaram (2005), in an article entitled "Hasanlu Golden bowl", has introduced Hasanlu hill and its ancient monuments, namely the golden bowl. Najafi Qara Aghaji (2012) investigated the relationship between the Hasanlu bowl motifs and its background and the people of that time from different tribes. In another study, Zardoshti (2020) investigated the mythical motifs on three golden cups of Hasanlu, Marlik and Kelardasht. Using mythology of Gilbert Durand, the present article examines Hasanlu golden bowl painting and analyzes it based on Durand's approach of the night and day system.

Theoretical foundations

1. Gilbert Durand's approach

A great number of works have been published by Durand, a French mythical critic, on topics such as myth, imagination, death and time. In his activities, he seeks to find the "creative self", the "self" which transcends the individual and social mental imaginations. He believes that the "creative self" is visible and obvious in the myth and can be easily found in it. Gilbert states that "self" has not much power to investigate the cause of human actions and behavior in general. This is beyond one's power. Therefore, in order to explain the behavior of people and turn it into art, one needs to find a reason beyond the personal ones, namely, the initial myth. The initial myth is originated from very distant past and its movement and flow is beyond the individual events and existential systems (Abbasi, 2009, 122). Durand says: "Our perception of the myth is a dynamic system of symbols, archetypes and stimuli. This dynamic system seeks to become narrative under the movement of stimuli. Myth is already an initial outline of rationalism, because it benefits from the speech flow in which symbols become words and archetypes turn into

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thoughts (Durand, 1996, 470). He considers the structure of myth to contain elements such as archetypes, symbols, and stimuli, and believes that stimuli are invisible forces which find their own symbols in order to appear. For example, the bird's wing is a reminiscent of flight. The number of symbols is immeasurable and varies from one civilization to another (Ghaemian, 2007, 8). In addition, archetypes are not dynamic. For example, the luminous archetype and the mountain peak are related to the ascending stimulus, while that of a sharp sword is associated with the separating stimuli. There is an unbreakable connection between the archetype and the symbol, and archetypes are converted into symbols due to the historical and geographical events over time. The archetypes are the origin of symbols which can guarantee their stability and permanence. Archetypes need symbols to flow as they are visible when they have penetrated at least within a symbol. Due to the dependence of symbols on social, cultural and environmental elements, they are dynamic in contrast to the stimuli and archetypes. For example, the ascending stimulus seeks to display its symbol. At the beginning of the ascending stimulus, it seeks its own archetype, i.e. the sky. Then, this archetype needs a ladder symbol to transform from power to action. The ascending stimulus and archetype are constant at all times and places, but the ladder symbol varies at different times and places. For example, the ladder symbol has been converted into an airplane today. The symbols become idioms and archetypes are converted into thoughts in a myth. In fact, the myth describes the stimuli, and it is a symbolic narrative in which the symbol is superior to the narrative process. The myth consists of a dynamic system, with the help of which the religious theory, national and mythical narrative are set in motion (Abbasi, 2002, 4). Durand categorizes all images and presents a systematic list of structural and archetypal stimuli. He then divides this category into day and night system. The daily poem itself is classified into two groups of symbols and pits two large groups of images against each other. The images of the first group indicate a great fear of time while those of the second one refer to the wish to win and overcome the anxiety of time and the desire to ascend and transcend human conditions. In fact, human thoughts in this structure are the same as primitive human thoughts. According to this thought, human being divides the world into two categories of good and bad and thus values the world (Abbasi, 2012, 82-83). The images of this system are divided into two conflicting categories. The first group includes the images of time and indicate the dominance of darkness over light. In fact, the symbols of this category seek to overcome the decline and anxiety with the images of death and darkness. These images represent the fear of animals, darkness and falling. The second category of images in the daily poem are symbols of ascension, light and separation. In this system, images with positive semantic load are contrasted with those with negative one (Durand, 1992, 71-70). However, in the night poem, instead of depicting the conflict, images alleviate the anxiety and fear of time. In other words, in this poem, the descending and sunset images are alleviations for the falling and night, respectively (Durand, 1992, 220).

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2. Hasanlu area and the golden bowl discovered there

Hasanlu archaeological site is one of the most important and prominent archeological areas in Iran, which is located in the vicinity of a village of the same name in the middle of Solduz fertile valley in the south of Lake Urmia. This area was explored in 1934 by a delegation of Iranian archaeologists and excavated again by an English tourist and archaeologist in 1936 and Iranian archaeologists in 1947 and 1957 (Talaj, 2016, 73). Hasanlu area consists of ten settlement periods and dates back to the sixth millennium BC until the early Islamic period. The cultural sequence of Hasanlu hill has been classified from top to bottom. It should be acknowledged that the 5th period is related to the Iron Age 3 during 500-800 BC (Dyson, 1998, 7). Dyson found the golden bowl in his excavations (Iron Age 1 during 1200-1500 BC), 4th period (Iron Age 2 during 800-1200 BC) and third period in 1955 from Hasanlu ancient hill. The report on Hasanlu golden bowl was first published in Life Magazine and it was exhibited in 1962 in "Exhibition of Seven Thousand Years of Iran" in Europe and US (Sadrai & Alion, 2009, 33). A great deal of research has been conducted by several researchers on Hasanlu golden bowl, and researchers believe that it is an artwork with amazing images and motifs and is of great value. Several images are drawn by the artist on the bowl, which, despite their small size in a not so large space, is full of themes, thus attracting the attention of the audience. Depicting imaginary and mythical images with all the details is a sign of the great desire of the Iron Age societies for the artworks (Porada, 2007, 132). The decorations are depicted on the rim and bottom of the golden bowl. The rim of the bowl contains two rows of tress-shaped ornaments, which are different from the bottom decoration. Also, in the main and central parts, the imaginary and mythical images are displayed. At the bottom of the bowl, a newborn is depicted whose mother gives him to a man holding an ax. Behind this scene, the image of the battle between demon with a three-headed tail and a bearded hero, where the hero of the narrative is destroying him. At the bottom of this warfare scene, the image of a roaring lion is depicted, behind which is a ram-riding goddess. In the upper part of the images, three war chariots are depicted carrying three goddesses. The goddess riding on the first chariot has two wings, a winged sun disk is drawn above the head of the second goddess, and the third one has a horned crown on the head. The wavy lines evoking water flow from the cow's mouth to the demon, and on the right side of the water flow, a priest, who has shaved his hair and holds a cup, stands in front of the goddess. Following this priest, two men are depicted who seem to have brought two rams with them for sacrifice. On the left side of the bowl, the motif of a chair with animal-shaped bases is illustrated, in front of which, there is a man holding a robe. Next to this image, there is a scene of a man being captured by two men. On the upper right, a vulture is depicted with raised wings, carrying a woman on its back. Besides, the image of the narrative hero is observed, who has arrows, bows and axes and a snake around

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his head. The last image on the left is of a goddess trying to ride on the back of a lion (See Figures 1 & 2).



Figures 1 & 2. Hasanlu golden bowl, northwestern Iran. source: Talai, 2019, 188.

The myth of Hasanlu golden bowl painting based on the mythological approach of Gilbert Durand

“In mythology, beings are supernatural and are especially known for the works they have done in time with eternal validity” (Eliade, 1983, 15). The myth is the manifestation of human power and will, and a symbol for Ahurian and Daevian beings. From a positional point of view, the mythical beings have no mediocrity, but they are either absolute good or absolute bad. In the myth of good, evil has no place and, conversely, in the myth of evil, goodness has no place (Mokhtari, 2001, 411). In Hasanlu golden bowl painting (Iron Age), one can observe the “creative imagination” of the maker who has depicted the mythical issues in his artwork. This art work of the artist in the Iron Age contains various archetypal themes and stimuli that lead the audience’s mind to Durand’s approach of day and night system (See Figure 3).

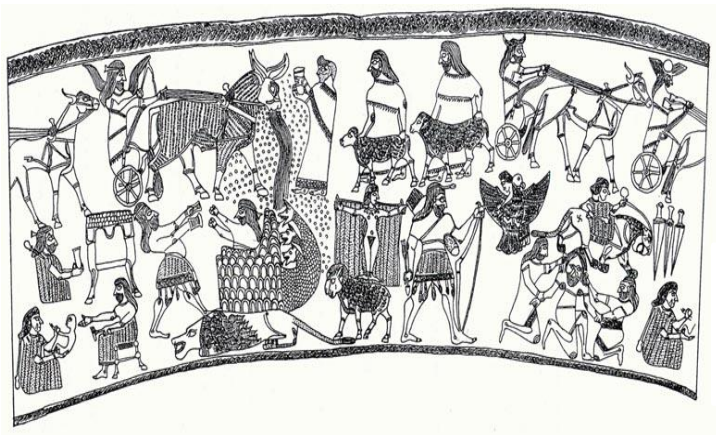


Figure 3.
The image engraved on the golden bowl source: Najafi Qara Aghaji, 2012, 83

1. Falling and Ascending Shapes

The images of falling are those which depict falling from a height or peak to the bottom (Sharifi Valdani & Shami, 2012, 306). This form of day system in Hasanlu golden bowl painting is has been depicted through images such as the exhalation of a tired lion, fall of three daggers from the air to the ground and capture of a man (Table 1). "The falling imagination does not necessarily mean that someone falls from the sky, but it means that the writer or human has a sense of falling. For example, dizziness or headache creates a sense of falling" (Abbasi, 2002, 83). The images related to the fall symbol (Table 1) exhibits falling in the most obvious way possible. Durand believes that "the fall is the true essence of every dark force, and Bashlar has the right to see the primitive and obvious metaphors in the falling stimulus" (Durand, 1992, 122). The scary images engraved by the artist on the surface of Hasanlu golden bowl are part of the night poem of imagination with a negative semantic load. Therefore, from a psychological point of view, if one analyzes the images based on the mythological structure of Gilbert, all the scary images depicted in the cup may reflect the bad spirits of the artist while engraving them. In other words, fear has dominated the artist when drawing these motifs. "There are ascending shapes versus the falling ones. The ascending shapes refer to the images that well show reaching the peak from the bottom" (Sharifi Valdani & Shamai, 2012, 306). The ascending images are depicted on the bowl with sacred images such as bird, goddess, cow and ram. According to the available images, they are sacred and ascending symbols for the artist and a symbol of purification from all impurities. "Not only the sky, but also height is sacred as it is a category that one himself have no access to and belongs to beings superior to human" (Eliade, 2005, 38). The ascending images in Hasanlu golden bowl are more frequent than the falling ones. Therefore, the maker of the bowl seems to have ascending spirits. "Symbols of ascension, with a general movement and leaving the opposite pole, which is the lower place (the place of the devil, stinky place, hell, etc.), try to go up (the place of God, or according to the myths, the place of the gods, a clean and fragrant place, etc.)" (Abbasi, 2002, 11). The attractive and pleasant images that the artist has engraved on the surface of the golden bowl are associated with the day system of fantasies with a positive semantic load. Therefore, if one describes these images from the psychological point of view based on Durand's mythological structure, they are not scary and anxious, and it seems that the artist has painted them when his spirits were good.

2. Darkness and light shapes

"The darkness shapes are forms inducing fearful states by describing or explaining the dark space or structures related to the darkness" (Sharifi Valdani & Shamai, 2012, 307). These images contain themes such as the destruction and death of the

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demon, cruelty of two men to the man who is being beaten and terrifying attack of the demon's tail with three snake-shaped heads. These elements which have been depicted in Hasanlu bowl painting, are examples of the darkness forms and are part of the night system. In the engraved images, the elements of darkness are closely related to the decay and sadness. Hence, the darkness forms are associated with death and sadness in the artist's imagination. Durand believes that "the night and midnight have terrible effects, the hours when evil animals and demonic monsters take over the bodies and ghosts" (Durand, 1992, 98). The dark elements in the drawn images are less abundant compared to the light forms. The light patterns include images related to the light and brightness. The motifs such as water archetypes, winged disk above the head of the second goddess, a glass of wine, birth of a baby which are all light stimuli, have been depicted in these images. The hero of the artistic narrative seeks to reach the divinity and the holy world through the symbol of enlightenment and other purifying symbols (ascension). Therefore, the symbols of light in the images of Hasanlu golden bowl meet a special spirituality and holiness and are fall within in the group of day system (Table 1).

3. Animal shapes

The animal shapes are aggressive and roaring beings which make the narrative's hero anxious with gestures and movements. The images in this category consist of symbols that show the negative features of the animals. All terrifying animals and creatures that cause fear or their terrifying actions, such as roaring, rushing, attacking, etc., fall into the category of night system. "These fictitious images represent two features of time, including the passage of time and destruction of everything through this transit. The imaginary picture of an animal has two characteristics: 1. An animal is something that is lively, escapes and cannot be captured. 2. The animal is what hurts, tears and finally kills" (Abbasi, 2002, 84). The archetypes and animal motifs engraved on Hasanlu golden bowl have both positive and negative meanings. The images of animals with positive semantic load include cows, rams and birds, while those with negative one include snakes, predatory lions and demons. All of these are manifestations of fear of time and decay, displayed in the forms of demon, lion and snake images (Table 1). According to the above-mentioned issues, the main and prominent subject in Hasanlu golden bowl painting is the battle between good and evil. It should be mentioned that this issue has been one of the most important topics in the national and religious myths. "The painter is strongly inspired by the support of good forces in the composition of these paintings. The bias toward the good forces is revealed by allocating the best and greatest space within the composition span to the hero of the event. The good and main character is always bigger than the sub-characters and the evil characters are depicted smaller." (Mahmoudi, 2009, 17). In Hasanlu golden bowl

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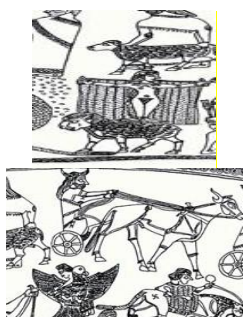


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painting, the artist has depicted an epic narrative, namely, the mythical heroic war against a legendary demon. According to other images engraved on this bowl and the movements of the hero and the demon, this artistic narrative indicates the hero domination over the demon.

5. Separating shapes

The separating forms are in contrast to the animal ones. Separating images are those depicted against animal shapes and scary creatures such as demons and to defend life. All weapons whose function is to deal with and protect against dangers, fall into this category of Durand's mythological structure (Sharifi Valdani & Shami, 2012, 309). In this category of images, one faces archetypes, such as the archetype of harpoon. The bow and ax here are the separating stimuli and fall in the category of the day system (Table 1).

Table 1. The night and day system in Hasanlu golden bowl painting (Iron Age) source: Authors.

Imaginary night system (symbols with negative semantic load)		
Falling Shape Symbols	Dark Shape Symbols	Pictures of shape animals
		
Tired of a tired lion, three daggers. falling from the air to the ground, captivity	Demon death, oppression, snake invasion	Demon, demon tail, restless animal movements, roaring lion
Daily system of imaginations (symbols with positive semantic load)		
Ascension symbols	Lighting symbols	Separator images
		
Goddess, bird, ram, cow	Water, winged pill above the head of the second goddess, wine glass, birth of a baby	Ax, harpoon and bow

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The bow and ax are weapons to fight with and kill the demon. The mythologists believe that the fight against demons can have two dimensions (spiritual and intellectual). In the first scene, the hero of the artistic narrative fights with a demon who can be a symbol of the carnal greed, and in the next scene, he goes against the social oppression after killing his carnal desires. This has been reflected by depicting the hero in two scenes on the bowl. In these two scenes related to the mythical hero, the bow and ax are reminiscent of the spiritual aspect. When the hero destroys the demon of lust with the mentioned weapons and removes the impurities from himself, he reaches a degree of superiority and spirituality compared to before. "The ax is able to split everything in half and separate good and evil with one blow. The bow is also a weapon which has been a symbol of power from the distant past until now" (Abbasi, 2006, 143).

Conclusion

Using psychology, sociology and anthropology sciences, Gilbert Durand explained his views on imagination and myth. He argued that the structures of the myth and imagination system are divided into two system, namely, the night and day. In the night poem, symbols representing the fear of death and time are present, while the day one contains symbols that represent the purification, desirable and sacred. The two system of night and day are the main features of the mythical world, because in this world, the Daevidian force fights with Ahurid force. It should be stated that the imagination leads the human mind toward the symbolism and minds are influenced by the myths. The myths bring people together by means of the unconscious mind and finally connect them and make them similar through creating similar behavioral patterns according to the heroes. The artist unconsciously depicts the individual and collective fear and panic known in the myth via the archetype. According to Durand's approach, it was found that Hasanlu golden bowl painting, which belongs to the Iron Age, is full of the representations of day and night system. In this painting, the structure of the imaginary system of the creator and the artist is more inclined to the drawing of everyday images and symbols. It is saying that this painting displays the world for the audience in a simplistic way within the framework of images in two poles of good and evil. The scene of the battle between demon and hero in this painting is the most important part of the artistic narrative and depicts the national and religious attitudes of the individuals and communities. The hero has appeared in two scenes, in both of which fights against the individual and social evil forces (lust, cruelty and tyranny). In both scenes, the hero is calm and is not afraid of the decay and death. Such a courage in the hero is due to the certainty about the eternity as the destruction and decline in the myths do not indicate the end of their lives. In this painting, the creator has illustrated a contrast between the death and the passage of time. To achieve eternity and destroy demon and evil, the artist has benefited from images

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and “symbols of ascension” such as bird, goddess, ram and cow, “symbol of light” such as water, winged disk, wine glass, newborn birth and “separating symbol” such as ax, harpoon and bow. However, in order to attain divinity and spirituality, the hero is confronted with night system, including “falling symbols” such as the lion's out of breath, three daggers falling from the air to the ground and captivity, “animal symbols” such as demon, demon tail, agitated movement of the snakes, roaring lion and “symbol of darkness” such as demon death, oppression and snake attack. In the artistic narrative of Hasanlu golden bowl painting, the artist further depicts the daily symbols with positive valuation, indicating the constructive attitudes and beliefs of the human societies of that time.

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