

Original Research Article

The Theme and Effective Factors in the Transformation and Development of «Swastika» Motif in Iranian Art from Ancient to Seljuk Period

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Abstract

Introduction: One of the oldest geometric motifs of the ancient world is a motif created from two crossed lines - a cross with broken arms or a ninety-degree angle. In international sources, this motif is known as «Swastika» with the concept of well-being, and in Persian sources, it is known as «Gardune-e Khorshid» and «Mehrane». Researchers consider the origin of this motif to be ancient civilizations such as the Indus Valley, Egypt, China, Mesopotamia, and the Aryan peoples, who, despite different names, have a similar formal structure. In Iran, this motif was depicted on pottery for the first time since the fifth millennium B.C., and its continued use can be seen until the beginning of the Islamic period. Identifying the theme and factors of drawing the Swastika in Iranian art and showing its evolution and development from the point of view of form and content in pre-Islamic Iranian art until the early Islamic era is one goal of the present study. In this regard, the questions of how the form and content of the Swastika have evolved in Iranian art from the ancient period to the Seljuk period and the common and distinctive factors of its drawing in the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods are addressed.

Research Method: The current research used descriptive-analytical and historical approaches. The data collection was conducted using library- and field-based methods. The statistical population included 29 samples from the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods with distinctive and distinctive characteristics that show the evolution of the Swastika.

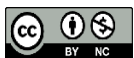
Findings: The presence of religion, especially the worship of Gods, burial rites and Mithraism in ancient Iran, was one of the essential reasons for drawing the Swastika, and for this reason, it is known as the «Gardune-e Mehr». Astronomical motifs such as twelve constellations and folk beliefs such as good luck, avoiding the evil eye, and being safe from calamity have been influential in representing this motif in both the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. In Islamic art, this motif is a symbol of light and, accordingly, God. Besides displaying its original form during this period, in some works, it has become «Solomon's knot» and «Shamseh» by combining curved forms and plant motifs.

Conclusion: The Swastika has been a sacred symbol in Iranian art from the ancient period to the early Islamic period and often served ancient myths and religions. In the early period, this motif symbolized the God and Goddesses of the Sun and was gradually associated with the ritual symbols of Mithraism and Zoroastrianism in works of art. In the Islamic period, this motif underwent metamorphosis and was used as a symbol of God and Islamic holy persons.

Keywords

Ancient Iranian Art, Islamic Art, Sun, Swastika, Gardune-e-Mehr

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Introduction and Problem Definition

Motifs in ancient Iranian art are often formed in connection with mythology, and the form of ancient Iranian religions is based on mythology. The Swastika¹ is an example of these mysterious symbols that contain mythological concepts. This motif has been seen in most of the great civilizations of the world with the common concept of goodness and almost similar forms, and different names have been attributed to it; however, its accepted name in international scientific sources is Swastika. The word swastika comes from the Sanskrit language, which literally means «good luck». In Iran, the Swastika is known as «Gardune-e-Mehr», «Gardune-e Khorshid», «Chalipa-e Shekaste», «Salibe-e Shekaste», «Crux Hamus²», and «Mehrane». Most of these names are used for religious and ritual reasons. The Swastika motif has been seen in a wide range of ancient Iranian works of art, from «Tepe Musian» pottery to «Parthian fabrics». In the early Islamic period, it shows a prominent presence on architectural works and pottery, especially vessels from the Samanid to Seljuk periods. In Iranian sources³, a variety of motifs with the usual Chalipa (cross) to the broken cross forms have been studied under one name, that is, Chalipa; however, in international sources, the Swastika is a pattern consisting of two crossed lines - a cross with broken arms and at a ninety-degree angle. Therefore, in the current research, the name «Swastika» is used because this international word has the most complete and universal expression of the form and content of this motif. The samples studied in this research are only the Swastika, and the motifs branched from it. This motif in Iranian art has formed the basis for the creation of other motifs such as «Solomon's knot» and «Shamseh». Also, the content of this motif in some eras, especially in the early Islamic period, has undergone metamorphosis and change of concept in accordance with various factors such as religion and has become the symbolic motif of its era. The stated cases have led to the formation of the present research. Therefore, first, the root of the Swastika motif and the evolution of form and content in Iranian art from the pre-Islamic period to the beginning of the Islamic period have been addressed. In the next step, the factors that are effective in its formation and continuation are discussed. In this regard, the current research seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What is the evolution of this motif based on form and content in Iranian art from the ancient period to the Seljuk period? 2. What are the common and distinctive factors of drawing this motif in the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods?

Research Method

The current research used descriptive-analytical and historical approaches. The data collection was conducted using document-based (library) methods. In the process of research, first, the artworks containing the mentioned motif in pre-Islamic and Islamic art were collected from printed and digital sources. In the next step, non-random sampling was done. The order of review of the works was based on the time period. From a historical point of view, the statistical community is the art of pre-Islamic Iran until the Seljuk period, and 29 samples have been studied according to the characteristic features of the form and content of the work and the continuation of similar characteristics of this motif from the pre-Islamic period to the early Islamic period. Due to the spread of motifs in the early Islamic period and the statistical society, only clay and metal vessels were used. In this research, by conducting extensive research, various forms of this motif were found in international sources, especially in the great museums of the world, most of which have been displayed and studied for the first time in Iranian art sources. In the content analysis of these motifs, the cultural, political, and social conditions, especially the common rituals and religions, have been studied. Moreover, data was collected, evaluated, and analyzed by

comparing the formal similarities of the examined samples. For a better understanding of the motifs and their evolution, the forms are drawn linearly.

Research Background

Among the papers published in the world's scientific sites, such as Academia and Researchgate, regarding the Swastika, most of the sources have been in the field of the ancient world. The root of this motif has been found in science - especially astronomy and related to the Sun. In an article entitled «The astronomical origins of the Swastika motif», «Coimbra» (2011) mentions the origin of this symbol in comets, which, by observing it in the sky, is considered as a divine manifestation. The article by «Burillo-Cuadrado and Burillo-Mozota» (2014) entitled «The Swastika as a representation of the Sun of Helios and Mithras», considered the Swastika to be a religious symbol in connection with Mithraism, and like Helios - the God and symbol of the Sun in Greece - a symbol of the God of Sun. In the field of Swastika in the Islamic era, we can also refer to studies by «Zidan» (2020) entitled «The concept and utilization of Swastika 'Hooked Cross' on Islamic artefacts» and «Mailland» (2015) entitled «Ibex, crescent, and Swastika as symbols of the God of lunar in the rock art of the ancient Near East and Central Asia», pointed out that they mostly refer to the presence of this motif in the Islamic period and they have not paid much attention to the connection of its concepts. Also, among the sources of Iranian writers in the field of Islamic art, two papers were found that were related to architecture and carpets. «Sattarnezhad, Parvin, and Hendiani» (2020), in their paper entitled «The symbology of Swastika in the Gonbad-e-Sorkh tomb», have considered the presence of this symbol on the tomb of the Seljuk period as a symbol of the burial ritual and in connection with death. «Salavati» (2008) also discussed the presence of this motif in the art of carpet weaving in her article entitled «The manifestation of the Gardune-e Khorshid symbol «Mehrane» in Qashqai carpets». The book authored by «Bakhturtash» (2007) entitled «Mysterious sign: The Gardune-e Khorshid or Gardune-e Mehr (Mithra)» is considered the basis of most related domestic sources. This book includes all types of Chalipa in world culture and civilizations. Regarding the name «Broken Chalipa», the sources related to the types of Chalipa can be found in the books entitled «The origin of Chalipa» by «Nihart» (1987) and «The broken Chalipa, a mysterious symbol» by «Akbari and Elikai Dehno» (2006), and the thesis entitled «Review the position of Gardune-e Mehr in ancient Iranian art» by «Lireh» (2015). Also the articles by «Keshtgar» (2012) entitled «Comparative study of the Chalipa (crucifix) as a religious symbol in the civilizations of ancient Iran, Mesopotamia, India, and China», by «Qaem» (2009) entitled «The message of the Chalipa (crucifix) on Iranian pottery», and by «Esfandiari» (2009) entitled «Chalipa, the secret of the perfect human being» is also related from other sources. Among the differentiating aspects of this research, compared to the mentioned sources, we can mention the rooting of the theme and the evolution of the Swastika in Iranian art from the ancient period to the beginning of the Islamic period, the explanation of the influencing factors on its drawing, and the reasons for its continued use until the period Islamic in a specialized manner, which was neglected in most of the sources or was examined superficially. Also, the diversity of motifs examined from the point of view of form has led to the rooting of some other motifs of the Islamic period, such as Shamseh and Solomon's knot, which is significant from this perspective.

Swastika

Swastika is an international term used in most foreign sources, a crucifix with arms broken at a 90 degree angle. The arms of this motif evoke the feeling of movement and rotation in the mind, and from this point of view, the rotation of the day and night and the rotation of the life can be considered as one of the primary concepts that led to the drawing of the swastika. In ancient Iran, the swastika was a symbol of the cycle of life and blessing (Lireh, 2015). The oldest Swastika dates back to the late Paleolithic and was carved on a 12,000-year-old mammoth bone bracelet in Ukraine (Ibrahimov, 2018). Most Iranian researchers consider the theme of this motif to be derived from the crucifix and call it the broken crucifix (Mohseni & Bastanfard, 2020). Cooper believes that the Swastika is probably a simplified form of a human with two legs and two arms, which are actually the four most important moving parts in the human body (Cooper, 2000, 244-246). In the thoughts of the people of most civilizations of the world, such as the Aryans, the Swastika has been interpreted in connection with mythology, heavenly forces, and especially the Sun. «Müller» believes that the Aryans used this sign, which is a symbol of the Sun, even before their historical dispersion (Zakerin, 2011, quoted by Nejatian, n d, 162). «Zidan» considered the Swastika as a symbol of the Sun, good luck, and fertility (Zidan, 2020). «Nik Kholgh» considers the Swastika as a simplified form of the Sun over time (Nik Kholgh, 2011). Religion is another reason for drawing this motif in Iran. Mithra, or Mehr, was a God worshipped by Iranians before Zoroastrianism, and his symbol was known as the Sun. «According to the Avesta book of Verjavand Ashunamad Zoroaster, Mehr (Mithra) is considered one of Mazdasna's Gods and has a wheel or Gardune» (Bakhturtash, 2007, 149). The God of the Sun in ancient Iran is one of the most famous Zoroastrian deities named «Mithra» (Bajlan Farrokhi, 2010, 108). «If we rotate this sign around its axis, it creates a wheel, so it is called the wheel of life or Gardune-e Mehr» (Keshtgar, 2012). In the sacred texts, Mehr is described as riding on a wheel (Mah Van, 2019). Salavati, citing Pirnia, considers «Mehrane» to be the Persian equivalent of the word Swastika (Salavati, 2008). «Mehrane means the wheel of the Sun and Venus, the manifestation and symbol of «Mithra», the four sides of existence, the four primary elements, namely water, fire, soil, and water» (Daneshgar, 2005, 164).

Swastika in Ancient Iranian Art

1. 5th millennium B.C.: Fig 1 is a piece of pottery discovered in the Tepe Musian dating to the 5th millennium B.C. In fact, this motif can be considered the oldest presence of Swastika on Iranian works of art.



Fig 1. Swastika, part of a clay vessel, Tepe Musian, 4000-5000 B.C., Louvre Museum. Source: Louvre Museum.

Fig 2 is a drawing of a Swastika on the body of a clay bowl in the National Museum of Iran, which is related to the pottery of Tall-e Bakun in the 5th millennium B.C. The form of this motif has been changed according to its location in the container. However, the characteristics of the original motif can still be seen in it, which shows that the artist of this region was familiar with the form of the Swastika. In this figure, with his creativity, he placed its form in a limited space, which has led to greater mobility in this work.



Fig 2. Swastika, Tall-e Bakun pottery, Marvdasht, Fars, 4500-4050 B.C. source: National Museum of Iran.

Swastika, in addition to the pottery of the Tall-e Bakun region, can also be seen on clay sculptures, which indicates the presence of a particular thought in the drawing of this motif. Figure 3 is a Swastika on a clay statue from 3800- 4200 B.C., according to the figure of a woman or a Goddess. This motif was probably part of a ritual tattoo that was used in the past on the bodies of people with special social status - for example, priests or people in temple service. «The function of this motif in tattooing the body was as a protection against the evil spirit» (Ibrahimov, 2018). In Iran, some nomadic women, especially in Kurdistan, Lorestan, Khuzestan, and the shores of the Persian Gulf, are fond of tattooing, and they tattoo crosses on their hands and faces (Bakhturtash, 2007, 87). Perhaps the presence of this motif in these areas, which were located next to this hill, was an extension of this idea of removing eye sores and staying away from demonic and satanic forces. From another point of view, this statue can be attributed to a Goddess who was worshipped in the past. According to the available sources, it is not clear that the Goddess was worshipped during that time; however, in later times, i.e., early Elam, the worship of a Goddess called «Pinker» or «Pinikir» was expected, which was the embodiment of creation and one of the greatest mother Gods of Elam. If this motif represents the Sun -as the creator God- then worshipping this God as the Sun Goddess before the Elamites is not far-fetched. Also, this Goddess could be worshipped under the influence of other cultures and rituals in the form of Goddesses such as Anahita. From this point of view, one of the oldest pre-Islamic religions in Iran, according to Tall-e Bakun pottery, was the worship of Goddesses. In other sculptures of this region, the Swastika with a different shape is present on female sculptures, which can be considered as the use of this motif related to fertility concepts.

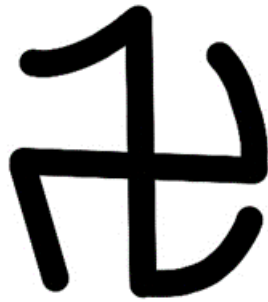


Fig 3. Clay statue from Tall-e Bakun with Swastika on the sides of the body, Fars, 3800-4200 B.C. Source: Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Chicago.

Fig 4 is a piece of pottery belonging to Susa from 3800-4200 B.C. A sacrificial crucifix can be seen in the center, and two swastikas can be seen above and below it. «Gordon Childe, the prominent researcher in the interpretation of the pottery obtained from Susa, considers the broken cross to be a symbol of the Aryan race» (Akbari & Elikai Dehnu, 2006, 12). Of course, this interpretation is not correct because the first migration of Aryans to Iran occurred in the second millennium B.C. This work is related to the fifth and fourth millennia B.C., which was before they arrived in the land of Iran, according to available scientific sources.



Fig 4. Swastika, pottery, Susa, , 3800-4200 B.C. Source: Louvre Museum.

2. 4th millennium: The variety of Swastika motifs on Tall-e Bakun pottery in the 5th and 4th millennium B.C. is unique among all pre-Islamic periods in Iran. This motif includes a variety of broken arms with a 90-degree angle to comb-shaped and inward broken arms. In addition to dishes, this motif is also used on the clay figures of this region, which shows its importance (Fig 5).



Fig 5. Swastika, earthenware vessel, Tel Bakon. Fourth millennium B.C. Source: Institute of Oriental Studies, University of Chicago.

Fig 6, the Swastika, is on a seal belonging to Susa, between 3100-3800 B.C. The outer arms of the effect are curved in accordance with the circle shape, but the central part still has the + shape. This change in motif drawing can be considered as a basis for the next era.

Compared to the previous works, the rotating form of this motif is more consistent with the circular form and, accordingly, the form of the Sun.



Fig 6. Swastika with curved arms on a seal, Susa, 3100-3800 B.C.
Source: Louvre Museum.

Fig 7 shows five Swastikas on a seal from Tepe Giyan in Nahavand. The distinctive point of this motif compared to previous works is the completely curved shape of its arms, which is reminiscent of antelope and ram horns on pottery, and it can be said that the artist used the shape of animal horns, especially rams, in drawing this motif. Also, in two clay vessels belonging to the 4th and 2nd millennium B.C., belonging to Susa, there are four goats, whose overall composition of horns and bodies is reminiscent of the Swastika. The ram is one of the sacred animals in the pre-Islamic art of Iran and was a symbol of fertility. «Researchers' studies have shown that most of the seals were located next to the arms of the corpses» (Bakhturtash, 2007, 187). These armbands were usually placed on the arms of people with the features of keeping away from the eyes, good luck, and protection of its owner, and turned this sign into a symbol of good origin that was embedded in the beliefs and thoughts of the ancient people. Therefore, the use of this seal can be considered related to the concept of «happiness».



Fig 7. Swastika with curved arms, seal, Tepe Giyan, 4th millennium B.C.
Source: Louvre Museum.

Figure 8 shows the Swastika on a piece of pottery from Tall-e Bakun. With curved arms that suggest a circular shape, this motif has comb linear decorations that are very common in the design of Susa pottery. The central part of this motif also consists of 9 squares. «Herzfeld» explained that this motif is a checkered square motif that is attached to its four corners, which look like a feather or half of a palm leaf, and it is obvious that they are in a state of circulation and rotation (Herzfeld, 2001, 22). Figure 9 shows the simplified and linear motif of Swastika related to silk pottery. Although the form of this Swastika is similar to the previous examples, it has characteristics that were seen for the first time in pre-Islamic art in this region. The form of the central circle can also be considered as the Sun, and each of the arms is like its radiant rays.



Fig 8. Swastika with shoulder arms, Tall-e Bakun pottery, 4th millennium B.C. Source: Herzfeld, 2001, 22, redraw

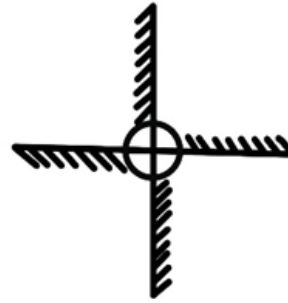


Fig 9. Swastika with comb-like arms, pottery, Sialk, redraw. Source: ;Bakhturtash, 2007, 162 .Vandenberg, 1969, 126

3. 3rd millennium B.C.: Fig 10, which is a clay bowl belonging to the southeast of Iran, in the period of 2400-2800 B.C., shows the shape of a Swastika whose arms are drawn in a curve like the effect of Tepe Giyan and Tall-e Bakun, but with the difference that each of the arms appears, based on its internal linear decoration, to be possibly a plant form or an antelope horn.

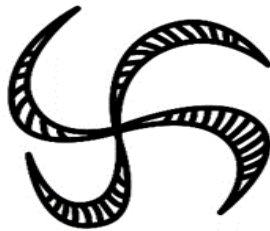


Fig 10. Swastika with curved arms and plant form, clay bowl, Sistan and Baluchistan, around 2400-2800 B.C. Source: National Museum of Iran.

4. 2nd millennium B.C.: Fig 11 is the Hasanlu Cup, which, according to «Ghirshman», is related to the end of the 2nd millennium to the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. and is related to religious ceremonies and the motifs on it indicate religious and mythological subjects (Ghirshman, 1992, 29). This cup narrates different stories, and the researchers believe that its origin is the result of the work of «local artists for the prince of Manna» (Ghirshman, 1992, 29), «inspired by a Hurrian epic named Komarbi» (Prada, 2004, 134-136), «Derived from ancient Persian stories» (Behnam, 1945), «related to the religion of love worship» (Jahanian, 1958, 56), «myths of the Manna civilization and their neighbours» (Nafisi, 2005, 209; Najafi Qara Aghaji, 2012). On the part of this vessel, the motif of a lion and its holder, which is probably riding on it, can be seen, and a Swastika is observed on the thigh of the lion. «Kambakhsh Fard» considers the carving of the Swastika in this cup as a symbol of superior power (Kambakhsh Fard, 2001, 35). «Prada» believes that the presence of this motif on the lions was aimed at inducing extraterrestrial and otherworldly power and its belonging among the Gods (Prada, 2004, 124). «Jobes» considered the motif of the lion in the civilizations of the Near East as a symbol of power and royalty, which was equal to the power of the Sun (Jobes, 1991, 75-77). In another part of this cup, there is a figure of a man with a winged circle, which Prada considers to be the God of the Sun (Prada, 2004, 132). All these elements show the connection of this motif with the religion of Mithra and the symbolic form of the Sun.



Fig 11. Swastika on the thigh of a lion, part of Hasanlu cup, late second and early first millennium B.C. Source: Najafi Qara Aghaji, 2012.

«Cooper» considers one of the symbols of the Sun to be the Swastika (Cooper, 2000, 133). In this case, this motif can be regarded as the first appearance of a lion and Sun in Iranian art. «In the culture and mythology of Iran, the lion is the embodiment of strength, power and strength and is considered the representative of the Sun» (Yahaghi, 2007, 280). Astronomy is another reason for drawing this motif. Leo (astrology) is another astronomical concept that is considered the house of the Sun. According to astrologers, whenever the Sun is placed in Leo (astrology), it is a time of comfort and peace. For this reason, in astronomy, the motif of the lion and the Sun as auspicious symbols has attracted the attention of astronomers, artists, and people (Khazaei, 2001). Also, the Swastika has been seen in the middle of the ram's horn on the pottery of Susa in the fourth millennium B.C. and on the petroglyphs of the regions of Iran such as Lakh mazar in Birjand and Dasht-e Toos. The motif of ram or lamb is a symbol of the first sign of the zodiac, Aries, and its presence with the Sun has a scientific basis.

5. 1st millennium B.C.: Fig 12 shows a necklace from the 1st millennium B.C. with three forms of Swastika, known as the Marlik necklace. The presence of this motif on the necklace can be considered in connection with the belief of the people with positive concepts and happiness behind this motif that the people of that period used on their ornaments.



Fig 12. Necklace found at Kaluraz (known as the Marlik Necklace) with a Swastika. 1000 B.C. Source: National Museum of Iran.

6. Achaemenid Period: Fig 13 shows the motif of an Achaemenid king fighting a lion. On the shoulder of the animal, there is a motif that seems to be formed from the repetition and rotation of the Swastika. Due to the prevalence of Zoroastrian religion in the Achaemenid period, elements of older religions such as Mithraism are also seen in this period. In Mithraism, the lion represents the fourth stage of the seeker. In addition to the fact that Iranians considered it to be the fifth sign of the celestial constellations (Leo), in Mithraism, the lion was associated with fire and took care of the sacred flame of the hearth (Hinnels, 2006, 135). The lion in the sculptures and works of art of the Aryans, especially among the Medes and Achaemenians, is a manifestation of Mithras, who was the great angel of the Aryans, and after Ahura Mazda, they respected and cherished it more than other angels. «In the religion of the Aryans before Zoroaster, Mithra, and Anahita were among the great and respected deities of the Aryans, and when Zoroaster appeared and made reforms in the

religion of the Aryans, in order to establish and spread monotheism, he lowered them from their position. However, due to the attention of the people and also because of the obvious characteristics and moral and social status of these Gods, he had to keep them in whatever quality they were, and thus, Mithra was pushed to the back and during the reign of the early Achaemenid emperors. There are no names of Mithra and Anahita in the stone inscriptions for this reason and because of the influence of the Zoroastrian religion. Perhaps the seal of Darius and some other seals that show the king hunting a lion were for this reason and to strengthen the Zoroastrian religion» (Qaem Maghami, 1966).



Fig 13. Achaemenid king fighting a lion with a Swastika symbol, Achaemenid. Source: Louvre Museum.

7. Parthian Period: In the Parthian period, this motif was seen on various works of palace decorations, including the plastering of the palace in Mount Khajeh in Sistan (Fig 14) to the works inside the graves, such as burial cloths and burial vessels in the Germe County Mughan region of Azerbaijan. The widespread of the Mithraism religion can be seen as one of the essential reasons for the expansion of this motif in the Parthian period. «The period of the Parthians was the peak of the expansion of Mithraism in Iran and beyond its borders» (Akbari & Elikai Dehanu, 2006, 46). In the pot graves that followed prehistoric customs in some regions in Iran, the dead head was usually placed facing the Sun at the time of burial. «The allegory of the Sun is mostly used in ritual symbols for the process of death and life again, and it is even a symbol of Simurgh, and the Sun as the God of light is its source» (Davoudi & Hosseinabadi, 2022, 37). The presence of the Swastika in the works related to the burial ritual on these works and the direction of the deceased's head along the Sun can be another reason for the illustration of this motif in the Parthian period.

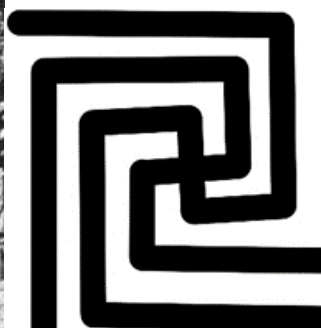
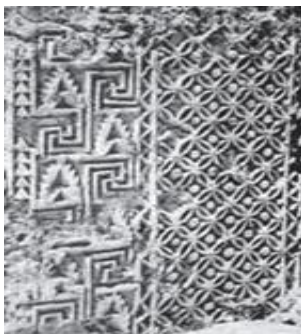


Fig 14. Plastering of a palace in Mount Khajeh in Sistan with a Swastika, Parthian. Source: Qaem, 2009.

8. Sassanid Period: Swastika is in most works of the Sassanid period related to religious architecture -fire temple and non-religious- palaces and castles. This motif is a variety of broken and geometric arms to curvilinear forms that indicate the creativity of the artist of that era. This motif has been observed in the architecture of magnificent palaces such as

Ctesiphon Palace, Bishapur and Kish Palace, Yazdgerd Castle, Chaleh Tarkhan⁴ in Ray and Fire Temple of Tappe Mil in Varamin. The use of plant forms along with this motif, which has been seen since the Parthian period, reaches its peak of beauty in this period. In the National Museum of Iran, there is a part of a piece of plaster related to Chaleh Tarkhan or Talkhan in Ray (Fig 15). The overall form of the work is a series of swastika motifs connected by curved arms. Plant motifs are also seen in the central part of all four connected swastikas. The nested curved forms evoke the motif of the wave and the movement of water in the mind, and from this point of view, it can be adapted to the sacred concepts of this sacred element of nature. «Filippou», in his paper on sacred symbols, based on a Christian belief in the four rivers of heaven, believes that drawing the Swastika (curve) was related to the sacred element of water (Filippou, 2016).



Fig 15. A part of stucco with a curved swastika, Sassanid, Chaleh Tarkhan. Rey. Source: National Museum of Iran.

The Role of Swastika in the Art of Iran in the Early Islamic Period

The culture and art of Iran in the Islamic period actually inherited the beliefs, rituals, and culture of civilizations such as pre-Islamic Iran, which were combined with the traditions of native art at that time. In Islamic art, due to the religious prohibition in the representation of reality, the abstraction of various elements can be seen, and this simplification is often present in Islamic forms, animal motifs, and the composition of works. The Swastika is an abstract motif from the pre-Islamic period of Iran, whose traces can be seen in the Islamic era with a new form and content. «Zidan» considered the entry of Swastika in Islamic art under the influence of Mesopotamia and Egyptian art. «Swastika» had found its way to Islamic art through Mesopotamia artistic traditions that had influenced the Anatolian and Shamate civilizations, and its presence in the 10th century A.D. in Baghdad and other areas of the Islamic Caliphate indicates a return to the concepts of immortality in ancient times. Of course, he also mentions another point of view that these motifs may have reached Muslim artisans through Coptic artefacts through the cross motif in ancient Egypt, which was known as the key to life (Zidan, 2020). Meanwhile, due to the long history of using this motif in Iranian art, Iranian art has been mentioned in a very limited way in international sources. Among the early examples of the use of the Swastika at the beginning of Islam - the Umayyad era, we can mention the pavement of Hisham's Palace in Jericho and the Abbasid era for the first time over the gates of Baghdad in Raqqa in the second century A.H. (Zidan, 2020). It seems that Muslim artists used the pre-Islamic Swastika like other motifs in the Islamic period, with a similar form but a new content. One of the elements related to the Swastika in the pre-Islamic art of Iran is the Sun, which was important as a source of light and heat. In the Qur'an, according to verse 35 of Surah Noor, light is mentioned as a sign of God. It seems that one of the aspects of the use of the Swastika in the art of the early Islamic period was the symbolic display of God on works of art in line with the verses of the Quran and Islamic principles. In the Islamic period, the broken crucifix continued with a religious connotation. From the time of the defeat of the Sassanids to the 4th century, it regained its previous position over time and was found again as a vital

religious symbol. In some religious paintings with the subject of ascension, a broken crucifix is engraved on the shiny forehead (Esfandiari, 2009). In the Islamic era, the crucifix, complete and broken, is a sign of the world of unity and a manifestation of the four main directions and the angels overseeing the four seasons and a symbol of the soul and renewed life (Cooper, 2000, 246-242). «Bakhturtash» considers the presence of the swastika motif in the Islamic period as a representative and a diagram of Aryan traditions and beliefs, which also gained influence in the religious thinking of the Islamic period and became related to the beliefs of Muslim Iranians, such as the belief in the family of the Prophet and especially Imam Ali (Bakhturtash, 1972). He considers the extension of some motifs in the Islamic period, including the Swastika, as a result of the thinking of Iranians with good taste and thought, who sometimes mixed it with the names of religious elders for its survival and durability and tried to preserve it (Bakhturtash, 1972, 87). «Ibrahimov» believes that with the progress of Islam, the Swastika, which was an ancient symbol and had nothing to do with the new religion, was combined with the latest concepts proposed in Islam. Among the Sunnis, the Swastika appeared as a manifestation of God and his divine light. The Swastika in the art of Shiite Muslims was composed of Kufic letters that represented the name of Imam Ali (Ibrahimov, 2018). Figure 16 shows the decoration of the entrance tile of the Bastam collection, with the arms of a central swastika ending with the word Ali.

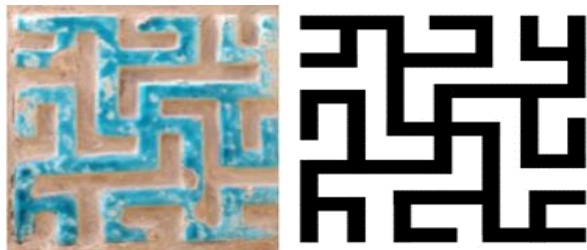


Fig 16. Tile decoration of the entrance gate with the motif of Ali combined with a central Swastika, Bastam. Source: Mohseni & Bastanfard, 2020.

1. Samanid Period: The first appearance of this motif in the pottery and metal works of the early period of Islamic art in Iran is related to the pottery of the Samanid period, which is unique both in terms of number and variety of form. The presence of the Swastika in Islamic art, especially in the Samanid period in Khorasan, can be seen as the result of the presence of pre-Islamic religions such as Mithraism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, and Christianity, and the complete freedom of non-Muslim artists and neighbourhood with ethnic groups such as the Sogdians. «Chengiz and Balkhariqahi» have considered the presence of traces of Zoroastrian, Manichaean and Ismaili religions in Khorasan and Neyshabur during the Samanid period as the result of the policy of softness and tolerance of its rulers (Changiz & Balkhariqahi, 2017, 1). «Shobiri Zanjani» also considers Neyshabur to be one of the four great cities of the Samanid period, where different beliefs and religions coexisted peacefully (Shobiri Dozeini, 2011, 33). «Boyce» also mentions Neyshabur as one of the prominent centers of Iran's spirituality, which was also one of the famous fire temples of that time called Azar Barzin Mehr fire temple in Khorasan, on the slopes of Mount Reont or Rivand Neyshabor (Boyce, 2002, 117). «Frye» also considers the presence of specific Christian motifs on Samanid pottery as a sign of the complete freedom of Christians in this period (Frye, 2007, 359). «Sadeghpour Firouzabadi and Mirazizi» consider the presence of non-Muslim artists and new Muslim artists of the Buyid dynasty as the reasons for the transfer of pre-Islamic-Sassanid motifs to the Islamic art of the Buyid dynasty (Sadeghpour Firouzabadi & Mirazizi, 2019, 27).

In Fig 17, the Swastika is placed negatively within the space of a central design. In Samanid period dishes, these motifs are central. In some cases, they have been accompanied by phrases in Kufic script with moral themes and concepts such as «He who speaks a lot, his mistakes will increase¹⁰» (Fig 17). The writings around the container are divided into four parts and are placed on the four sides of the container like the four-part form of the central motif. Figure 18 shows a cup in the Metropolitan Museum, on the body of which the Swastika is enclosed in a circular form. On the handle of this dish, the shape of an animal probably shows a lion, which is reminiscent of the motifs of the lion and the Sun of pre-Islamic Iran.



Fig 17. Swastika in negative form in a clay pot, Neyshabur, 10th century, Samanid period. Source: Metropolitan Museum.



Fig 18. A cup with a swastika on its body, half of the 9th century to half of the 10th century A.D./ 3-4 A.H. Source: Melikian Chirvani, 1974, 135.

Figs 19 to 22 show a fusion of the Swastika with plant forms, which presented a new form. This motif changed over time, and with spiral arms and artichoke leaf motifs, it was integrated, creating new motifs that became popular in this period and initiated new decorations in the Islamic art of the later era.



Fig 19. Clay pot with Swastika. 4th century A. H., Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 581.



Fig 20. Samanid period plate. Source: <https://turkote.com>. (access date: 18/12/2023).



Fig 21. Clay pot, 9th and 10th centuries A.D. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig 22. Swastika with curved arms combined with plant motifs in the Islamic period. Source: Bonhams auction.

Fig 22 shows a plant motif; the overall composition of its elements is the shape of a Swastika. The twisting and curving forms in the circulation of these motifs are reminiscent

of plant motifs in pre-Islamic artworks, especially silver vessels of the Sassanid period (Figs 23 & 24).



23

Fig 23. Sassanid vessel with vine branches and fruit, British Museum. Source: Toos Foundation.



24

Fig 24. Sassanid period vessel with the motif of vine branches and its fruit. Source: University of Washington.

From the rotation and combination of the Swastika form, other decorative forms are created, some of which can be considered the origin of many suns of the Islamic period. «Mohseni and Bastanfard» believe that even the Sun in geometric motifs (knots) is an evolution of the circle of the Mehr, which found a new meaning in the Islamic period (Mohseni & Bastanfard, 2020). «Khazaei» considers the motif of the Sun in Islamic art as a manifestation and physical symbol of the Prophet of Islam. Also, by quoting poems by poets such as Rumi, Shabestri, Attar, and Sanaei, he related the concepts of the Sun and light in these poems to Prophet Muhammad (Khazaei, 2008). Figure 25 shows a decorative motif on the bottom of a clay vessel, which was created by rotating a Swastika, and its form is similar to a motif on the lion's shoulder from the Achaemenid period (Fig 13).



Fig 25. Bowl, Neyshabur, Samanid period, 10th century A.D., Source: Grubeh, 2005, 59.

In international sources, there is a sign called Solomon's knot, which is also known as «Sigillum Salomonis» in Latin texts. This motif consists of two closed circles that are connected and intertwined dually. As a universal symbol, it is a geometric shape that implies eternity. «Erdeljan and Vranšević» consider the use of this motif in a Christian church as a symbol of the timeless and unchanging eternity of salvation (Jelena Erdeljan, 2016). Since continuous rotation is one of the characteristics of the Swastika, this rotation can be considered to be related to the concepts of immortality, infinity, and eternity, which also coincide with the meaning of Solomon's knot. In this case, it is possible to consider

Solomon's knot derived from Swastika, which was accompanied by changes in its form. Figure 26 shows the motif of Solomon's knot on a Samanid period dish.



Fig. 26. Solomon's knot on a Samanid vessel, 900-1000 A.D., Eastern Iran, Victoria and Albert Museum. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.

Fig 27 shows a motif with tangled and knot-like lines, the general shape of which is reminiscent of the swastika motif and the tangled linear forms of Solomon's knot motif. This decorative knot can be seen with changes in later works of Islamic art.



Fig 27. A bowl with a knot motif on the door, 4th century/10th century, Neyshabur, Samanid period. Source: Metropolitan Museum of New York.

In Fig 28, there is a motif of a square with revolving arms in the form of a conger leaf, and its overall composition is very similar to the motif of a pottery vessel from Tall-e Bakun in the 4th millennium B.C. (Fig 8).



Fig 28. Clay vessel, Neyshabur, 3rd century A.H., Samanid period, National Museum of Iran. Source: Authors.

2. Buyid Dynasty: Fig 29 shows the motif of a lion and a shape similar to the Swastika or Solomon's knot on its back, which, according to Bakhturtash's book, belongs to the 4th century A.H. in Ray and belongs to the Buyid dynasty. This work is thematically similar to the lion motif in pre-Islamic metal cups, such as the Hasanlu and Marlik cups, and can be considered the first appearance of the lion and sun motif in Iran during the Islamic period. «This Aryan sign was gradually transferred from the thigh of the lion to the top of the lion's

head, and gradually its branches were compressed, took the shape of a star, and became the sun over time, and became the basis of the history of the lion and the Sun, and gained a symbolic value» (Bakhturtash, 1972).



Fig 29. Lion with Swastika, Buyid dynasty, 3rd or 4th century A.H., Ray. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 583.

In the Islamic period, in some texts, the placement of the lion and the Sun in literature is described, especially its epic type, and it can be one of the reasons for drawing this motif. Ferdowsi, in his *Shahnameh*, the section of the kingdom of Shapur Zul-Aktaf, begins his verses with the beginning of the day as follows: «When the Sun emerged from the lion tower's bosom, Daylight blossomed, and dreams vanished¹¹» (Ferdowsi, 1960, 232). From another point of view, some consider the simultaneous presence of these two motifs to be attributed to Shiite beliefs. «The motif of the Sun as the symbol of the Prophet of Islam and the lion as the symbol of Imam Ali» (Khazaei, 2001). Since the Buyid dynasty was considered a Shiite government and always sought to express this importance, this presence can also be related to religious reasons.

3. Seljuk Period: In the architectural works of the Seljuk period, influenced by pre-Islamic art, the Swastika has been seen in the Alaviyan dome in Hamadan and the Round Tower in Maragheh. «Pope and Ackerman» consider the Swastika as one of the introductory brickwork motifs of the Seljuk period (Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 144). In the Seljuk period, the Swastika on the lion's thigh and Hybrid animals based on the lion's motif, such as sphinxes, Sun and flower, can be seen on the clay works known as Gerrus, which can be considered as signs of the influence of pre-Islamic art. In Fig 30, the arms of the Swastika are drawn with teeth, and their direction of movement is clockwise.



Fig 30. Swastika with serrated arms, pottery, 11th-12th century A.D., probably Amol. Source: Grubeh, 2005, 116.

Fig 31 shows a metal object, which is probably a dish, and decorations similar to the Swastika form of the Samanid period in the shape of a Sun can be seen on it. Also, this motif represents the Sun. Inside these rays of light are also sentences written in Arabic language and script.



Fig 31. A sun - probably Swastika on a Seljuk period metal vessel, 1100-1200 A.D., Department of Islamic Art, Louvre Museum. Source: Louvre Museum.

Discussion

The findings of the present research have been collected and categorized based on the analysis of the Swastika form in the studied works and the analysis of the content of this motif by using various sources related to the culture of the Iranian people in fields such as mythology, religion, popular beliefs, literature, and science . Table 1 shows the factors that influenced the drawing of Swastika during the period of study of Iranian art. The findings were collected according to the studied samples, and if there were more samples, better results would have been obtained without a doubt.

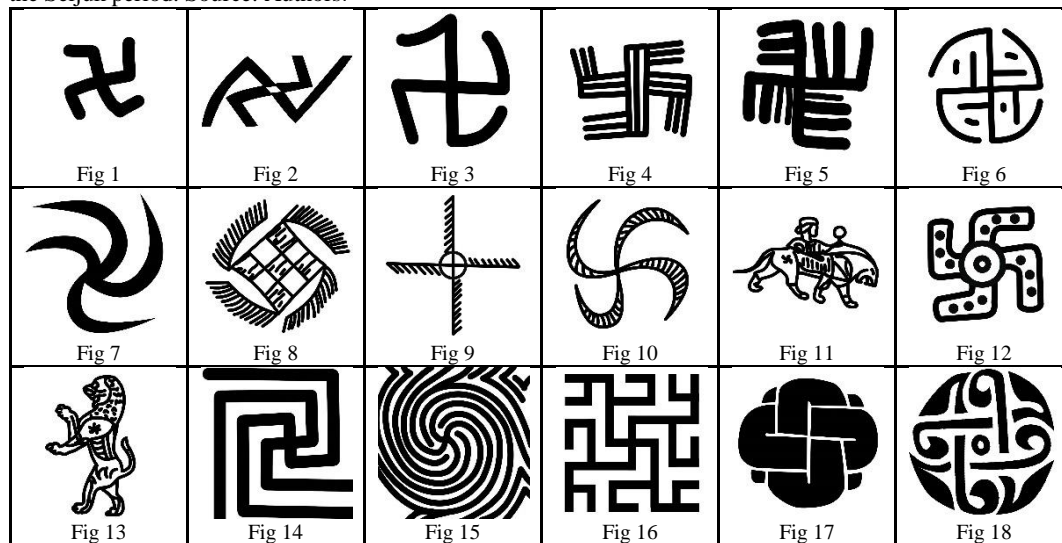
Table 1. Factors influencing the drawing of the Swastika in Iranian art from the pre-Islamic period to the Seljuk period. Source: Authors.

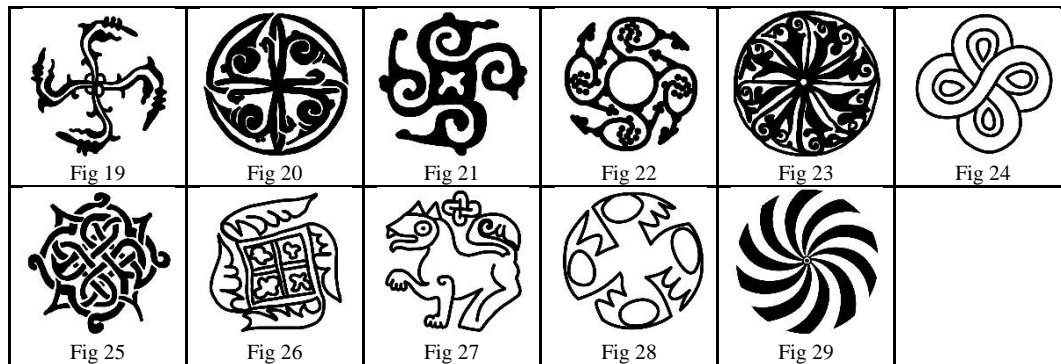
Drawing factors	Pre-Islamic period	Islamic period
Myth	Mythological and sacred concepts due to the presence of Goddesses on the statue, related to the God of the Sun, lion, and goat as animals with symbolic concepts such as power and fertility, related to water and its Gods.	In the Islamic period, myths undergo metamorphosis and a change of meaning due to religious prohibition and become symbolic elements of the Islamic period, just as the pre-Islamic lion and sun motifs are interpreted as a symbol of Islamic holy people and Solomon's knot as a symbol of immortality in the Islamic period.
Religion	One of the symbols of pre-Islamic religions, Goddesses, the worship of Mehr or Mithras	Continuation of pre-Islamic thoughts and a manifestation of God in the Qur'an, attribution of the motif of the lion and the Sun to holy people such as Imam Ali and the Prophet in the continuation of the pre-Islamic religious function, the Sun is a symbol of Prophet Muhammad.
	The use of this motif in religious places such as pre-Islamic temples and works related to funeral ceremonies and rituals such as cups, cloths and pots	The presence on the architecture of tombs and Islamic religious places such as mosques, the influence of other religions such as Mithraism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity and the presence of non-Muslim artists in drawing this motif
Popular beliefs	It has the concept of goodness and happiness, healing eye wounds, healing the sting of demonic and satanic forces, the presence of plant motifs as blessed and holy symbols, and the lion as a symbol of royalty.	Combined with plant motifs as a symbol of blessing and sustenance, the presence of writing containing moral concepts

Drawing factors	Pre-Islamic period	Islamic period
Literature	In this research, no written document related to these motifs in pre-Islamic literature was found. However, pre-Islamic literature can be considered as one of the fields of the formation of the literature of the Islamic period, especially the Shahnameh, which mentions the presence of elements related to the Swastika, such as the Sun, and its connection with astronomy.	Using the poems of different poets and especially the poems of Shahnameh in drawing this motif
Science	Combination with animal motifs, including ram and lion in connection with astronomical symbols	The combination of animal motifs, including the ram, in connection with astronomical symbols, especially the zodiac

Table 2 shows the evolution and formal development of Swastika in Iranian art from the pre-Islamic period to the Islamic period. The form of some pre-Islamic motifs has been repeated in the art of the Islamic era, despite the long period and the change of religion, and this shows the consistency of the form and content of this motif, which the artist has continued to use in his work after different periods. Also, from the repetition and change of the form of this motif in the Islamic era, motifs such as the Sun and Solomon's knot and other decorative motifs have been created, whose traces can be found in the art of ancient Iran. The combination of Swastika form and plant motifs seen in Iranian art from the Parthian period reaches its peak of beauty and decoration in the art of the Islamic period, which itself becomes the beginning of decorative motifs in the Islamic period. The use of Swastika with right-angled arms and straight lines in the architecture of the Sassanid period, with changes such as combining with holy words such as the name of Imam Ali, entered the architecture of the Islamic period.

Table 2. The evolution of the Swastika form and its subcategories in Iranian art from the pre-Islamic period to the Seljuk period. Source: Authors.





Conclusion

Due to its particular form, the Swastika is one of the few geometric motifs that people with their own thoughts and ideas have used for works of art, and it has always had a meaning beyond mere decoration. This motif was seen for the first time in Iran in the fifth millennium B.C. in the pottery of Tall-e Bakun and Tepe Musian. In Iran, the theory of attributing this motif to Aryans is rejected. This motif has always been a sign of the Sun, and its presence together with the lion as «lion and Sun» is seen for the first time in pre-Islamic art in the Hasanlu Cup- 2nd millennium B.C. and the Islamic period of Iran in Buyid pottery. The presence on the clay statues of ancient Iran indicates the Goddess of the Sun, which existed much earlier than Mithraism. This motif is still present in the Zoroastrian religion in the continuity of the symbolic concepts of the past and then enters the Islamic period. In the art of the Islamic period, it was seen for the first time in the Samanid period on pottery, which showed the continuity of ancient Iranian culture in the Islamic period. In this era, this motif was also introduced as a symbol of the light and manifestation of God in combination with ancient concepts. Religion, especially the worship of Goddesses and Mithraism in pre-Islamic Iranian art and astronomy - the presence of the Sun and animals attributed to him, has been one of the most important reasons for drawing these motifs. The presence of this motif in pre-Islamic tombs - on pots and fabrics and tombs of the Islamic period - indicates the connection of these motifs with life after death. In the Islamic period, probably due to the new conditions and atmosphere, in some cases, its content was changed and attributed to holy people such as Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali. This motif in the Islamic period, with changes such as composition and rotation in the form, turns into the Sun and Solomon's knot. The presence of moral and instructive texts alongside this motif in the Islamic period shows its importance.

Author Contributions

This paper is extracted from the PhD dissertation of Mohammad Motevalli entitled «Retrieval of the roots of pottery and metalwork motifs of the early Islamic period in Iran: Samanid, Buyid, Seljuk», supervised by Khashayar Ghazizadeh and Morteza Afshari at the Faculty of Art of Shahed University.

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Conflict of Interest

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Appendix

1. Zidan has considered two forms of writing for this motif in his article. Swastika, the widely used clockwise rotation is commonly known as Swastika and the left anti-clockwise rotation is known as Sauvastika (Zidan, 2020).
2. It is known that the Romans called the Swastika, the hooked cross (Coimbra, 2011, 81)
3. «Ziapour, 1974»; «Bakhturtash, 1972»; «Mohsani and Bastan Fard, 2020»; «Keshtgar, 2012» and «Qaem, 2009».
4. Čāl Tarḵān-‘Ešqābād

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