# ISLAMIC WOOD WORK MOTIFS OF IRAN AND INDIA IN MUGHAL ERA

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# THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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#### ABSTRACT

This survey was conducted to identify the design of motifs and pattern found in the wooden objects of Iran and India during the Mughal period.

The art of the Timurid period in Iran is best known in scholarly literature for its unsurpassed achievements in the field of miniature painting, and, to a lesser extent, for its architecture. The decorative art of this period, such as wooden work, have been largely neglected, in part because the amount of preserved material was thought to be limited. This misconception has been fostered by the fact that few of the numerous examples held in public collections have been published; while many of those objects that have been published are misattributed. A similar situation exists with regard to the general study of Iranian and Indian wooden work, in that published material is limited in comparison to the great number of extant objects, while many questions of attribution and dating have yet to be successfully resolved.

In so far as the wooden work of the Mughal period is concerned, some progress has been made in terms of the establishment of data and provenance for a limited number of objects, however, the majority of these remain to be identified, studies and further classified. It is therefore essential to establish a means by which to identify Mughal wooden work. This is one of the intentions of the present dissertation.

The current study related to motifs, as effective elements in the review and analysis of artistic works, possesses an important place in the field. To obtain the best results about the roots of the motifs used in Iranian and Indian wooden objects, after clarification of the characteristics of Islamic art, the art of objects and motifs in Islamic lands has been perused in the context of the form of the motifs in various eras. To access this intention some leading and typical works from each era have been chosen and shown.

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After a review of the motifs, a complete technical and artistic description of the objects is provided that describes the decorative structure of the ornamental themes. In addition, the scientific, artistic terminology for the ornamental themes is provided. Thus, the researcher has brought to light a new academic approach to the study of Islamic wooden art by analysing the motifs of the samples gathered from Iran and India using the visual semiotic and Iconography theories. In this survey, the researcher utilized the qualitative technique in order to produce the best data. Analysis was conducted and the researcher referred to the selected motifs to produce a continuum of original motif that has been studied previously. Each motif has been studied and refers to the elements of the art and design in each study conducted. After analysis of the motifs, the meaning of the abstract and natural motifs used in the decoration of wooden objects was identified. The results showed the role of religion, the artists and the meaning of the motifs in transferring the pattern from Iran to India.

#### ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk menganal pasti reka bentuk motif dan corak yang terdapat dalam objek-objek kayu di negara Iran dan di negara India dalam era Mughal. Seni pada era Timurid di Iran terkenal dalam kesusasteraan bagi pencapaian dan sumbangannya dalam bidang lukisan serta sedikit sebanyak untuk seni binanya. Seni hiasan era ini, seperti kerjakerja kayu, telah banyak diabaikan kerana jumlah bahan yang dipelihara adalah dianggap terhad. Kesalahfahaman ini wujud kerana fakta yang mengatakan bahawa hanya sedikit sahaja contoh koleksi awam yang telah diterbitkan, sedangkan kebanyakan objek yang telah diterbitkan adalah dengan tidak berasaskan. Situasi yang sama wujud pada kajian berkenaan kayu-kayu di Iran dan di India di mana bahan yang diterbitkan adalah terhad berbanding dengan jumlah objek yang masih ada, manakala banyak persoalan tentang atribusi dan tempuh masa masih belum diselesaikan. Sehingga kini terdapat sedikit progres dari segi pengekalan sumber dan data bagi setengah-setengah kerja-kerja kayu zaman Mughal. Walaubagaimanapun kebanyakannya masih perlu diidentifikasikan, dikaji dan diklasifikasikan. Oleh itu, adalah penting untuk mengekalkan cara mengenal pasti kerjakerja kayu era Mughal ini. Ini merupakan antara tujuan kajian disertasi ini. Kajian semasa ini yang berkaitan dengan motif sebagai elemen yang berefektif dalam kajian dan analisis artistik serta prosesnya memainkan peranan penting dalam bidang ini. Untuk mendapatkan hasil kajian yang memuaskan mengenai asal motif yang digunakan dalam objek-objek kayu di Iran dan di India, selepas kajian ciri-ciri seni Islam, seni objek dan motif di negaranegara Islam telah menelitikan dalam kontek bentuk-bentuk motif beberapa era. Untuk menilai matlamat ini beberapa kerja tradisi kayu telah dipilih dan dipaparkan daripada setiap era. Selepas kajian mengenai motif, penerangan teknikal dan artistik lengkap objek diberikan, menerangkan struktur motif perhiasan. Tambahannya, istilah-istilah saintifik dan artistik bagi motif-motif perhiasan diberikan. Oleh itu pengkaji menggunakan kaedah ilmiah pada kajian kayu-kayu era Islam dengan menganalisis motif-motif bahan contoh dari Iran dan India. Dalam kajian ini, pengkaji menggunakan kaedah kualitatif dengan teori-teori semiotik visual dan ikonografi untuk menghasilkan dapatan kajian yang kongkrit. Analisis telah dijalankan dengan merujuk kepada beberapa pilihan motif untuk menghasilkan kesinambungan motif asal yang telah dikaji sebelum ini. Setiap motif telah dikaji dan merujuk kepada unsur-unsur seni dan reka bentuk. Selepas dianalisis motif, makna dan motif asli yang digunakan dalam perhiasan objek-objek kayu yang dikenal pasti. Dapatan kajian ini menunjukkan peranan keagamaana, artistic dan makna motif dalam memindahkan corak negara Iran di negara India.

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### **CHAPTER 1**

# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1.** Introduction to Islamic art

Art is the creation of symbolic figures to express human emotion, and often uses concepts that are directly related to the symbols for emotional expression giving such artwork an intellect dimension. The symbols can be used to create a direct and immediate relationship between man and art. Symbolism is important to mankind. One significant manifestation of its importance can be seen in art (Baker & Smith, 2009a; Dabbour, 2012).

According to the Islamic perspective, each symbol has a visual, worldly, and spiritual aspect (Chitsazian, 2007). In other words, all worldly things are represented as tokens of another world (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1999). Religious artists turn to allegorical language to express and substantiate their concepts. The relationship between symbolism and art contains many complex issues. Art benefits from symbolism as it adds levels of expression. An example of this can be seen in traditional Persian art where different forms of artistic expression have the same meaning, which is derived from Persian and Islamic beliefs. These forms of traditional Persian art also communicate the idea of unity through multiplicity, which is an important value expressed in Persian art. In addition to creating beautiful images, Persian artists further understanding through symbolism (Farshidnick, 2010).

The symbolic ornament of Islam has fascinated Western observers, and continues to provide material for numerous studies attempting to explain its nature in aesthetic, mathematical, mystical, or even cosmological terms. The consistent feature that characterizes Islamic art is the tendency to invest an object with universally accepted themes and symbols, thus enhancing its intrinsic value. The geometrical, floral or figurative content of this ornament is obvious, but in spite of the fact that many works have been published on the construction and analysis of Islamic patterns (Creswell, 1961; Critchlow, 1976a; El-Said & Parman, 1976; Jones, 1978), none has delved very deeply into the subject, and no comprehensive work has yet appeared dealing in a comparative and systematic manner with the whole range of patterns, both geographically and historically, especially in respect of wooden objects. There is clearly a need for a more scientifically based account of these patterns. Hence, in the absence of a definitive work along these lines, I will attempt here to show ways in which some of these patterns will be d by a specific theory to obtain a deeper understanding of the subject.

From another point of view, the character of the unity and diversity of Islamic art has been led to controversies and hypotheses for years. Needless to say, the artistic production of the Islamic lands reveals a number of consistent features, as well as distinct regional variations and period styles. Iran and India, as the most famous centres of Islamic art, are consistent with this fact. The whole range of Islamic patterns represents an amalgam of many different styles, some of which were simply adapted and absorbed from classical sources and from the various cultures with which Islam came into contact during its early expansion (Atil, 1981). Since it is not possible to cover all types of Islamic pattern in wooden art here, I will limit myself to an examination of certain of the more interesting and typical examples that belong to the Mughal era in specific locations of Iran and India.

#### **1.1.1. Symbolic art**

A large number of elements forming human culture have a unique basis and foundation that have passed through undated to the historical era. In addition, in every period and time, and every place and location, people disintegrated from their own imagination and beliefs and gave a new manifestation to it. In a way, with the identification and analysis of each of these elements we may trace unified links and the attachment of nations and distinction between them. Thus, accessibility to such identification helps identify the part of hidden historical and philosophical points, the roots and foundation of different customs and traditions, religions, fictions and beliefs (Hedayat, 1943).

Sociologists define religion as "a system of belief in supernatural powers, symbols and formalities", thus working to make life meaningful and understandable (Bit, 1996). Hence, religious symbols help create a resonant myth is expressing the moral values of the society or the teachings of the religion, fostering solidarity among its adherents, and bringing adherents closer to their object of worship. The study of religious symbolism is either Universalist, as a component of comparative religion and mythology, or in localized scope, within the confines of a religion's limits and boundaries.

Some would assert that every object is a manifestation of the divine and that it contains divine truths as experienced by its maker. The perception of divine truth can also be seen as an interpretation of human essence. According to a traditional perspective, unity is an expression of the divine because it is a mirror that reflects perfection. These attitudes and the use of symbols contain an eternal and ultimate goodness. They are repeated over and over again in art and architecture. Not only are they symbolic, but they also provide a prospective for focusing on the origins of the universe (Ghehi, 2010).

Symbols and images represent philosophical principles in the form of visual art. As mentioned earlier, art is an expression to inspire our spiritual dimension. Spiritual symbolism in Hinduism is a concept of understanding the Almighty, which cannot be perceived through the sensory organs. Great Hindu thinkers explained and translated that knowledge through symbols, images, idols using metaphors to reveal our true spiritual nature and the nature of the universe around us.

In ancient times, symbols were the main source of recording, explaining and revealing to teach the meaning of the Divine without using a written Language. Therefore, the art form was/and is the best media (unique gift) to make ordinary people understand the concept of God and its existence without learning the written language. A well-known saying is that one picture tells the story of a thousand words. This is the best example of philosophy of art hidden in the symbols. There are various ranges of art form, such as sculptures, paintings and images to depict God. Hindus utilized art forms as a tool to invoke spirituality.

Spirituality in prayer is a fundamental attitude of spiritual expression and the immediate result of prayer is the inner comfort that comes with/from acknowledging one's limited capacities and accepting a higher power than oneself. It is the higher form of communication with the Lord and purpose of prayer that may carry a different intent for different individuals.

The recurring symbols of Iranian myth date back three millennia and are seen in the art of *Luristan* bronzes (Fleming et al., 2005b). Artists, like anyone else, are affected by and imbued with the myths and symbols of the culture in which they grow up. The methodical elements –whether knowingly or unknowingly – are mostly used in artistic production. The various art forms of Iran, past and present, offer ample evidence of this influence. Of course

any talk of Iranian art needs to take into account the regional trends within it that were to be found in Persian, Bactrian, *Sogdian, Kuchean* and other Iranian centres. Furthermore, in the Iranian lands there were other Hellenic, Indian, and in the *Tarim basin* Chinese strands that were far from negligible. What the researcher attempts to show the main symbolic, religious motifs of Iran entered into the Mughal Indian world. It should be remembered throughout this study that, historically, Iranians were found over a much wider area than just present day Iran. Instead, the ancient lands of the *Tarim basin*, Bactria, and *Sogdia* were peopled by various East Iranian speakers; while the Iranian plateau was dominated by West Iranian groups of whom the most prominent were the Medes and then Persians (Scott, 1990).

### 1.1.2. Islamic art

Islamic art is the exponent of the religious, social and political virtues of the Islamic world. This art is the culmination of the general productive and formative energy, which brings to exact expression the luxuriant, highly developed way of life of Muslims.

To be a critic, one must be a sociologist, and the character of the Muslim nations. In their character, one shall find their artistic aims. One must examine the practical needs and natural surroundings in the daily lives of these nations, as only then can one estimate the means they had for attaining their artistic aims.

Islamic art extracts its source from two elements: religion and nature. Muslim artists, are inspired by their religion, and consider themselves humble compared to their great creator, Allah, "Because is God your Lord, The creator of all things" (Quran, S. x1:62).

Nature is the window of art. However, the artist does not go to nature, to acquire all the elements they desire, and copy them exactly as they exist in nature. Therefore, the Muslim

artist is in a position of being a creator philosopher and not a mere imitator. Religion imposes rules on the artist and Islam directs them to the ideas and the principles of the artistic styles. There are references throughout the Quran that animals, birds, plants, trees and other natural elements are sources of nature and signs of beauty. At the same time, there is another aspect to artistic activities, which makes it clear that God is the only creator. God considers man his artistic achievement, and, therefore, the human form is supernatural. For this reason, artists prefer not to incorporate anthropomorphic forms in their artwork.

Heaven is also another influence of religion in Islamic art that is promised to the believers. Thus, the artist`s hand and mind go freely to the ideal picture, which is drawn based on their imagination as inspired by the Holy Book. There is one more character of Islamic art – calligraphy – that should be mentioned as an influence of the faith as a decorative means. Epigraphy works as a preacher. Such words illustrated in the Holy Quran are an artistic flow that the artists use to beautify their objects. It is thus the artist who glorifies and decorates the sacred words of God in the most unique representation (Abdel-Wahab, 1970).

# 1.1.3. Mughal Empire

The early part of the eleventh century was the beginning of a renaissance of Iranian culture. For nearly four hundred and fifty years, between the end of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, Iran was successfully ruled by three major dynasties: the *Il-Khanids*, the Timurids and the *Safavids*. During the rule of these dynasties, Iran underwent a series of profound political and cultural changes that left their mark on the evolution of various artefacts of Iranian material culture (Fleming et al., 2005a).

By the end of the fourteenth century, Iran was dominated by the emergence of a new political and military power in Transoxania and cantered at Samarkand, namely, the Timurid state. The Timurid dynasty was found by *Timur*, a Turku-Mongolian descendant of *Chingiz Khan. Timur* conquered much of Western Asia through a series of rapid military campaigns. Iran was included among *Timure*'s conquests in 1383, a decade before his death. The Timurid dynasty ruled Iran for a period of one hundred years, with major political and artistic centres located at Herat and Shiraz. The Timurid culture was known as being refined and elegant.

For architecture and the arts, the Mongol conquests resulted in the Iranian world becoming the undisputed center of artistic and cultural innovation in the Islamic world, and the visual arts in most Islamic lands after 1250 can be understood in terms of their reliance on or reaction to Iranian models and ideas. Iranian art was also the channel through which Chinese decorative motifs were disseminated throughout the Islamic world. For the first two and a half centuries, Iranian ideas were paramount among the regional powers, while after ca. 1500 the preeminence of Iran was challenged by new imperial powers, the Ottomans in the eastern Mediterranean and the Mughals in northern India. Nevertheless, Persian culture and language remained the standard against which achievements were measured. Only gradually, did Turkish replace Persian as the literary language at the Ottoman court and new Ottoman artistic formulas replace traditional Persian ones. Similarly, Iranian artists immigrated in the mid-sixteenth century to the Mughal court in India, where Persian manuscript traditions were avidly adopted; however, only late in the century did the distinctive Mughal idiom of book illustration and decoration emerge, although Persian remained the literary language there for centuries (Dale, 1998).

#### **1.1.3.1.** Wooden art

Wood is one of the elements found in nature that has provided Muslim artists with the greatest scope of inventiveness. Highly developed techniques of carving have been used over the centuries for a variety of decorative and ornamental themes. Of all the regions in which Islamic art flourished, Iran and India are without doubt the richest in artistically worked woodwork (Pope, 1939). Moreover, there is a remarkable continuity in such remains, which enables us to attempt to discover a full history of its technique.

Woodwork is designed in the same way as other artworks that consider order, proportion, harmony, contrast, and balance as design elements while expressing unity through multiplicity. This means that different decorative elements and components introduce harmony and unity to the composition. Ultimately, the design of a wooden object reveals the artist's genius and the mystical, abstract concepts that influence Persian and Indian–Islamic art.

# **1.1.3.2.** The woodworking craft and its products in Iran

Despite the fact that Iran was and continues to be relatively poor in forest cover, the craft of woodworking achieved a high level of artistry throughout the centuries. Unfortunately, due to the perishability of the material, relatively few wooden objects have survived; however, those that remain demonstrate that wood played an important role in decorating buildings and providing people with necessary household utensils.

The use and working of wood required craftsmanship that, over time, developed into a variety of specialized arts. The artisans, the tools they used, and the motifs and forms that they developed and applied were not peculiar to Iran alone. Much of the woodcarving and carpentry of Iran therefore is very much like such work in India, Central Asia, Turkey, and

the countries of the Arab Middle East (Sharafi, 1977). The similarity in design and motifs of woodcarvings and carpentry objects during the Islamic period was fostered by the common cultural and religious context of Islam, which begat a large range of geometric ornamental patterns, a development facilitated by the progress made in mathematics in the Abbasid Empire (Tahvildar, 1963).



Figure 1.1: The wooden throne, Darius the Great of Persia on throne in *Apadana* Palace, Persepolis (522 BC - 486 BC)

The best-known Persian example is depicted in the reliefs in the throne hall, council hall, and treasury of Persepolis: the legs of the wooden throne shown there are very well turned and have embellishment (Figure 1.1) (Jamzadeh, 1996; Pope et al., 1964a).

Iranian documents show that the craft of woodcarving was already well established shortly after the Islamic conquest (Pope, 1939). *Qumm, Rayy, Tarq* near Isfahan, and *Gorjaniyeh*, were mentioned for their good quality furniture. In addition, some mosques of Iran at this time had wooden columns and ceilings. Richly ornamented pulpits were widely used;

ceilings and windows were ornamented with intricate lattice work, and wooden lanterns crowned the top of minarets (Wulff, 1966).

Although wooden beams have been used in Persian architecture since at least 6000 BCE, the use of carved and ornamented wood was began at a much later date. The technique used for ceilings was also employed in making windows (*'urusz*) and pulpits, and, hence, involved the same craftsman (*qab-sazs*), to facilitate his work, the carpenter relied on a cardboard model of the window with paper replicas of the glass pieces glued to it. These contained ground plans, patterns, *muqarnas* vault plans and the like, as is clear from a few surviving samples (Floor, 2006).

It would seem that none of these forms of woodwork were as yet utilizing the panel technique of *girih-sazi*, the basis of which is a lattice frame either left plain or filled with wooden insets, coloured glass, or other materials. Although this technique, as mentioned above, was undoubtedly used prior to the fourteenth century, there are no wood examples surviving from before that time. Among the earliest examples is the balustrade of the pulpit in Nain, dated Rajab 711 (October-November 1311) (Figure 1.2). *Girih-sazi* remained a popular decorative technique for palaces, mosques, and private homes in the centuries thereafter (Mustafavi, 1964). Other carved decoration occurs in particular on the wooden doors, cenotaphs, and grilles (*zuvarha*) of shrines, usually combining strap-work (*qa'b-bandz*) and painting and displaying either geometric or floral designs. The same types of design can also be found on cenotaphs inscribed with *Quranic* texts, the name and genealogy of the deceased, and the names of the founder and the carpenter. Shrines in the *Gilan* and *Mazandaran* regions, some dating back to the fourteenth century but most to the first half of the sixteenth, are particularly rich in such decorative woodwork. The oldest

carved wooden door, dated 706 (1306-7), is in the *Imamzadeh Qasim* (in *DoHazar*, *Mazandaran*); it features strap-work and knots (*qa'b va girih*) (Sotuda, 1970).



Figure 1.2: The pulpit in Nain, Girih Sazi, wood, 711 A.D. Nain, Yazd, Iran

In the Mughal period, *Timur* captured many craftsmen for decorating his palaces and other buildings and the furnishings therein. In particular, the many carved wooden doors, panels, and wooden Qur'an stands made during that period stand out for their excellent artistry (Lenz & Lowry, 1989).

# 1.1.4. Mughal Empire in India

The Mughals (1526-1739), the dynasty that succeeded the *Lodis*, displayed an intense interest in architecture. The emperor Babur (1526-30) laid out several gardens during his short four-year reign while Akbar and *Shahjahan* erected some of the most magnificent examples of Muslim architecture in India. *Humayun* (1530-56), Babur's son and successor, founded a modest city called *Din Panah* (Refuge of Religion) on the banks of the *Jamuna* 

in 1533. No trace of *Humayun*'s city remains, however, since *Sher Shah Sur* (1540-5), his successor, plundered and razed the settlement (Lowry, 1987).

In 1540, having defeated *Humayun* and driven him and his Mughal followers from India, *Sher Shah* began a new city, called *Shergah* (*Sher*'s Place) or Delhi *Sher Shah*. The city was located near the site of *Din Panah*, and appeared to have covered a considerable area. Islam Shah (1545-54), *Sher Shah*'s son and successor, built a palace-fortress called *Salimgarh* (Residence of *Salim*) for his family and retainers on the banks of the *Jamuna* north of *Shergah*.

In 1636, the Mughals began work on another city in the Delhi area. In the northern sector of the triangle, on a piece of ground overlooking the river, the Emperor *Shahjahan* founded a completely new city called *Shahjahanabad* (Abode of *Shahjahana). Shahjahanabad* served as the Mughal capital from 1648 until the effective demise of the empire in 1739 (Blake, 1991).

## 1.1.4.1. Woodwork in India

In ancient India, wood was the most popular medium for making carvings and sculpture for architecture. In fact, architecture and woodcarving have always been intimately connected with each other, and, the study of one, therefore, is related to the study of the other. Ample mention of the art of woodcarving is found in the early literature of India. It is mentioned in the Vedas (155 B.C.-800 B.C.), and also in the great epics *Mahabharat* and Ramayana (c. 1000 B.C.).

The use of wood in India for carving purposes from very early times has been reported in many scholarly writings (Agrawala, 1967; Banerjea, 1956; Saraswati, 1957). As a great example, the palaces of *Chandragupta Maurya* (4th cent B.C.) at *Pataliputra* were made of

wood. That timber was extensively used for the construction of buildings, and, therefore, for carving purposes during the *Mauryan* period is shown in *Megasthenes'* account of the *Mauryan* capital of *Pataliputra* (near Patna). This Greek Ambassador resided at the court of the Emperor Chandragupta. According to his description, timber was the most popular building material. That gold and silver were used for the ornamentation of woodwork becomes apparent from his depiction of the Royal Palace in which the pillars of wood were entwined by vines embossed in gold and ornamented with designs of birds and foliage in gold and silver (Brown, 1965).

The great importance that was attached to the use of wood for architecture and image making in ancient times becomes apparent in the description of the careful selection of wood for these purposes by contemporary Indian texts on architecture and iconography. The *Vishnudharmottara*, text of the 6th century A.D., mentions, in great detail, the use and selection of wood for architecture. The *Brihat Samhita* of *Vdrah Mihira*, datable to the 7th century A.D., also gives detailed instructions on the use of wood. Easy availability of timber and comparative ease of working it – either in relief or in the round – was one of the main reasons for its abundant use for artistic expression. In India, image worship is of great antiquity, and this practice must have resulted in the production of many idols (Agrawal, 1971).

Although there are ample references in the literature to the use of timber for construction purposes, the actual remains of ancient Indian woodcarvings of a period earlier than the 7th to the 8th centuries A.D. are, unfortunately, few in number. Even of the fortifications surrounding *Pataliputra*, the great capital city of the *Mauryan* Empire, nothing has survived, except fragments of the wooden ramparts unearthed at *Bulandi Bagh*, near *Patna*. The main reasons for the scarcity of old examples are the easy destructible nature of wood,

the action of the hot and humid climate of the country, the depredations of insects and the devastation caused by the invaders of alien faith who sacked many of the splendid temples of India.

Some regions of India, *Bengal*, *Gujarat*, *Kerala*, etc. have yielded wooden and architectural pieces. In *Gujarat*, Jain shrines and balconies were carved in wood. No woodcarving from *Gujarat* is known prior to the 16th century (Mughal period), but there are excellent later woodcarvings from the Gujarat area up to the 19th century (Agrawal, 1971; Burges & Cousins, 1903; Treasurywala, 1928; Trivedi, 1965).

After the Mughals gained power in India, the migration of artists to their courts formed the most decisive link between Iranian traditions and the taste of Mughal India. That is the beginning of the strong relationship between the art of Iran and India during and after the Mughal era.

The imperial Mughal artistic ateliers were among the most productive of their time. Relatively large numbers of illustrated manuscripts, textiles, jewels, arms, and more fragile objects in glass and jade have survived and are the subjects of an increasing number of studies. Mughal woodwork, however, is not known (Skelton, 1982) or has yet to be identified. Other than a few pieces classified as such in the 1930s (Codrington, 1931), and two others in 1982 (Welch, 1985), no work in wood has been identified (Slomann, 1934). This apparent lack of surviving wooden objects cannot be simply explained by the damaging monsoon climate of the subcontinent or by the Islamic traditions followed by the Mughals, for there is documentary and material evidence indicating that their workshops did produce woodwork. Furthermore, Mughal woodworkers also made use of the rich Mughal decorative repertoire to embellish their products, in the same fashion as did their colleagues working in other artistic industries.

It is commonly thought that the Islamic world has little in the way of woodwork because timber was not widely available in many regions and had to be imported (Rogers, 1996). Various styles of thrones and footstools, low tables, and boxes and caskets of several types were employed in the different Islamic courts. Such pieces were often produced in a variety of media, but their study has been widely neglected. One reason for this may be the scarcity of extant examples. Only a few well-known secular pieces, such as thrones and boxes or caskets (Pope et al., 1964a), as well as various pieces of "religious" woodwork including *rahlas, minbars* and doors are survived (Sulayman al-Isfahani, 1360).

# **1.2.** Objectives of study

This study embarks on the following objects:

- (i) To identify the visual features of wood work in India and Iran.
- (ii) To assess the roots of the motifs that are used in Indian and Iranian woodwork
- (iii) To express the symbolic meaning of motifs of wooden works in Iran and India.

(iv) To introduce and interpret the similarities and differences between the motifs of Iranian and Indian wooden works based on their visual and conceptual features.

# **1.3.** Research questions

For analysing the motifs of Mughal wooden objects, the researcher poses certain questions to reach a better understanding in this subject. Answering these questions will help to provide a better insight into these motifs in the Mughal dynasty. This study aims to answer the following questions:

- RQ1 What were the main motifs of wooden objects of Mughal art in India and Iran?
- RQ2 What were the roots of the motifs of the wooden objects in Iran and India in the Mughal era?
- RQ3 What were the concepts behind the symbolic motifs in Indian and Iranian wooden artefacts?

RQ4 What were the similarities and differences between wooden art in India and Iran?

#### **1.4.** Significance of research

The wave of modernization has indirectly changed the lives of the people. Therefore, the art of traditional woodwork will definitely fade away over time. To safeguard the survival and prevent it from extinction, this study hopes to revive the art by promoting and enabling it to flourish.

Moreover, the Timurid era in Iran and the *Gurkanid* dynasty in India were illustrious historical periods in both countries. In addition, wooden objects belonging to the Mughal era have been the one of unknown subjects than the other handmade. Although the subject of wooden objects is amazing and valuable, unfortunately, the only noticeable items in Mughal art in Iran and India are miniatures and the architecture, and there is no reference to Mughal wooden artefacts directly. Therefore, examining and surveying the artefacts of this era seems necessary because not only is this project an artistic research but also a systematic and analytic research. Therefore, it will help to promote the history, art and culture in both countries, and will show the influence of these different cultures on each other; because these traditional arts are not only important sources of identity but also an expression of identity.

It is hoped that the accumulated material and knowledge gathered in this study can be used as a reference to appreciate and understand the fine art of the traditional woodwork of those motifs in the Iranian and Indian subcontinent.

# **1.5.** The scope of research

There are many types of motif in wooden objects, all of which are affected by different factors, such as culture, nature, religion, etc., in the study of motif design; the researcher focuses on the Mughal dynasty.

The broad purpose of this thesis is two-fold. One, to provide a systematic study of the motifs of wooden work, which will here be shown to have been produced in Iran and India; and, two, to relate these motifs to one another. Therefore, in the present research I intend to focus on the actual theme, describing and classifying the known depictions of symbolic motifs and attempting to interpret them.

According to the above-mentioned scope, there is no explanation about the technique of manufacturing, the instrument, or the species of wood used for making wooden objects in India and Iran in the Mughal dynasty.

# **1.6.** Limitations of study

A comparative study of Indian and Iranian wooden object's motifs is a unique topic, and, sadly, there are infrequent English and even Persian sources in this field. Since wooden objects are an organic material, which deteriorates easily, only a small number of actual wooden objects have survived. In addition, because of the perishable features of wood, the remaining samples mostly have unrecognizable motifs. Therefore, the analysis of this kind of sample will be very hard to access. For all these reasons, historical research in symbolic motifs of wooden objects in aforementioned date and countries takes a long time to do.

### **1.7.** Theoretical framework

#### **1.7.1.** Erwin Panofsky theory

The theory used in this research is the Erwin Panofsky theory about Iconography and Iconology. Erwin Panofsky is particularly well known for his studies of symbols and Iconography within works of art.

According to the dictionary, Iconography means "the study of traditional images or symbols and Iconology with a similar definition as the study of Icons or artistic symbolism".

Referring to Erwin Panofsky (1982), the present research will utilize the framework of iconography, which is divided into three major parts: pre-iconographical description, iconographical analysis, and iconological interpretation.

A "pre-iconographical description," on the basis of "practical experience," interprets "primary or natural subject matter."

An "iconographical analysis" ("in the narrow sense of the word") that can be discovered by a knowledge of literary sources.

An iconological interpretation ("Iconography in a deeper sense") directs itself to Panofsky's original concern with "intrinsic meaning of content".

The first level is pre-iconographical description in which the motifs, lines and patterns are identified. Such identification may be affected by the social, historical, political and economic background. Hence, it has connection to the experiences. The equipment essential for such identification is merely common sense and superficial knowledge of the context.

The second level is iconographical analysis, which deals with stories, images and allegories. It needs functional and practical experiences. It means that there is always background information behind the image, which is necessary to know before any interpretation can be made. Such background information may be in the form of oral tradition or written text, with which we are required to be familiar.

The last level is iconological interpretation, which is beyond knowing the particular theme or story. This level needs the power of understanding or a faculty that can interpret. It is released to the ability of the interpreter to decode the motif based on the background information. However, the interpreter's subjectivity affects the way of explanation. In this case, the historical process may be helpful to achieve the correct interpretation (Figure 1.3) (Panofsky, 1982).

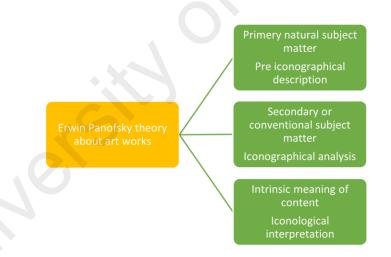


Figure 1.3: The theory of Iconography and Iconology by Erwin Panofsky

#### **1.7.2.** Visual semiotic theory

"Semiotics is the theory of signification, that is, of the generation or the production of meaning" (Bronwen, 2000). The focus of Semiotics is to understand the ways in which signs

are formed. This has been a concern going back has far as Ancient Greece, where philosophers debated the relationship between signs and their meaning.

Sings appear in various ways; they can be written and/or oral words or any kind of sound or visual image. Semiotic s of the images in the visual means may help us to reveal their innate meanings. Of all the approaches used for the analysis of visual images, the most popular one is the semiotics.

Visual semiotics emphasizes the ways visuals communicate and the system dominating their usage. As an apparatus directly associated with culture, semiotics is fundamentally diverse from the traditional criticism. Obviously, traditional criticism primarily is the aesthetic object or the text according to their face values. Nevertheless, semiotics predominantly enquires into the ways through which the meaning is created rather than simply investigating what it is. Human being has always wanted to understand and interpret the world he lives in. He desires to get to know, and read, the nature, the universe, human being and his culture, which is why he needs to think about and analyse their meanings. The meaning doesn't necessarily come out obviously, it often exists latently and waits to be disclosed, analysed and read (Parsa, 2004).

In this dissertation, semiotics is used as method of analysing. During the analysis, after an introduction of the theory of visual semiotics, it will be aimed to clarify the meaning construction process and its interpretation at the perceptive level and the course of shallow meaning units into the deeper levels of meaning in the selected motifs besides the Panofsky theory of Iconology and Iconography.

# **1.8.** Definition of terms used in the study

In this research, the researcher used some terms that will be repeatedly echoed through the research and which are defined below:

### 1.8.1. Islamic art

A culture or civilization that professes the faith of Islam is called Islamic art. "Islamic art not only describes the art created specifically in the service of Islam, but it also characterizes secular art produced in lands under Islamic rule or influence, whatever the artist's or the patron's religious affiliation"(Grabar, 1987).

#### 1.8.2. Motif

Motif is a symbol, sign or a graphic sign of the universal common laws that has been created for many years. A motif is an ornament built on rhythmic alternation or repetition of geometric or representation of the elements. It is predominantly used in decorative and applied art. It is also defined as elements or fragments, that, when joined together, create a larger design work.

# 1.8.3. Arabesque

Arabesque is a form of stylized vegetal ornament that centres on scrolling vines issuing *palmettes* and half *palmettes*, but which can also include ancillary elements arranged in a linear progression that are suitable for, but not limited to, boarders or framing devices (Riegl, 1992).

#### 1.8.4. Khataee motifs

*Khataee* is a motif of a flower stem or tree stems or bush with floral and blossom. It is an abstract tree and a sort of design that is stylized and is not the same as nature. In fact, *khataee* is a sort of motif that should embrace flowers, blossoms leaves and joints and establishes unity among them. Stems in this motif are in a rhythmical curve and they are a charming form of coquetry with curved lines, and, in rare cases, in direct lines. Sometimes, spiral circles connect flowers, leaves and joints to each other. These circles continue and draw the viewer's imagination. Sometimes, broken and sometimes a whole curve becomes a field for displaying flowers and leaves (Critchlow, 1976a).

# 1.8.5. Calligraphy

Calligraphy in Arabic is "*handast al-khatt*" which can be translated as the geometry of writing. Islamic art and Arabic calligraphy are often considered one and the same, and it would not be an overstatement to declare that if one were to select an archetype that best characterized the sensibility and virtuosity of Islamic art – that is so say, if one were attempting to identify its ultimate form of expression – it would have to be epigraphy, and, more specially, an inscription incorporating the name of God: Allah. The purpose of this part serves to present a chronological overview of the indisputable importance and widespread propagation of calligraphy, and the innumerable and varied examples of its use.

The Arabic script, one must recall, is written from right to left along a horizontal line. Originally, there were three basic styles of Arabic calligraphy, which underwent slow and constant process of evolution: *mudawwar* (rounded), *muthallath* (triangular), and *ti`m* (twin, i.e. a composite of the rounded and triangular style). These styles evolved into two dominant trends: *muqawwar*, which could be considered the ancestor of all forms of cursive script and was easy to write, and *mabsut*, which was angular with straight strokes and a tendency to horizontality.

The most popular styles were the rounded cursive *Naskhi* script, and the rigid and angular Kufic script (which takes its name from the Iraqi city of *Kufa*, though there is no evidence that this style actually developed there), which is especially used in monumental inscriptions and for transcribing Quran manuscripts. There are numerous variants of both Kufic and *Naskhi* script, which are generally designed according to the treatment of their vertical strokes: foliate, floral, plaited, or animated, when the ends of the *hastae* or vertical strokes, or even the entire letters, are transformed into human faces and, in some cases, into animal promotes.

Among the cursive types, six styles are most commonly used by Muslim calligraphers: The *Thuluth* style (or "one-third"), the *Muhaggag* style, *Tawqi*, which literally means "signature", the *Riq`a* style that was derived from *Thuluth* and *Naskhi*, *Ta`liq*, and *Nasta`liq*.

From the sixteenth century onward, Iran and India – regions where Farsi and Urdu were spoken, as well as a number of Turkish dialects – made widespread use of *Ta`liq* and nasta`liq calligraphic styles, and, although a large number of variations and subdivisions existed, we will conclude by mentioning a few more styles, namely *Shikasteh*, *Shikasteh*-*amiz*, *Diwani* and *Jalili*, which were greatly in vogue among the Ottomans during the sixteenth century (Siddiq, 1990).

#### 1.8.6. Geometric motifs

The geometric patterns have been another unifying factor in Islamic art and architecture. Despite the large geographic area of Islamic world, with its various ethnicities, cultures, environments, languages, and artistic traditions, Islamic art remains united in its use of geometrical patterns. The ideological reasons behind the artists` predilection for this form of art are complex. Since the advent of Islam, strict monotheism and the destruction of idols in Mecca resulted in a rejection – at least within a public context – of all forms of anthropomorphic art; but rather than limiting the range of artistic expression, this only served to push it in a variety of directions, into territories that may be lesser known but are no less rich in potential.

Infinity is the key word in the geometric context. Given the impossibility of a real depiction of God, who is often "represented" in written form, and depending on the context, to the extent that it is possible sometimes all that is shown is one of God's unique and inimitable attributes: that concept of infinity. Like that of eternity, which goes hand in hand with it, it is certainly not of this world, and is pervaded by so many transformative possibilities that it is impossible to enumerate them all. Thus, interpretation of reality through mathematical and geometric forms became one of the prerogatives of Islamic art, and it is spectacularly implemented in almost every field (Critchlow, 1976b; Nasr, 1987).

# 1.8.7. Fleur de lys

The stylized form of a lily that is used as a decorative design or symbol called the *fleur de lis* or *fleur de lys*. It can carry at the same time the religious, political, dynastic, artistic, emblematic, and symbolic meaning different culture like Persia and Europe. In European countries it mostly is known as in French heraldry.

#### 1.8.8. Girih chini (Sazi)

This technique creates complex geometric designs by assembling small pieces of wood at different angles and connecting them with mortise-and-tenon joints (Kian Mehr, 2001).

#### **CHAPTER 2**

#### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1.** Introduction

All the lands taken over by the Muslims in the seventh century, which formed the core of the Islamic empire, in its widest sense, had been affected by the Sassanid Empire, on the one hand, and Byzantine and Western Christian arts, on the other.

In human or natural representation, the most illusionistic traditions of the first century C.E. coexisted with the more abstract, linear, or decorative modes that developed after the third century, during which the vast majority the techniques of decorative and industrial arts had been elaborated. The Muslim conquest did not take over large territories in a state of intellectual or artistic decay. Although the empires of Iran and Byzantium had been weakened in the first part of the seventh century by internal troubles and wars, these disturbances barely hampered their intellectual or artistic activities. The Muslim world did not inherit exhausted traditions but dynamic ones, in which fresh interpretations and new experiments coexisted with old ways and ancient styles. The whole vast experience of ten brilliant centuries of artistic development provided the Islamic world with its vocabulary of forms.

The traditions of this world were many and diverse, and early Muslim writers were fully cognizant of the distinctions in culture between the *Sasanian* empires and Byzantine. The *Sasanian* Empire of Iran was entirely swallowed up by the Muslims, and its artists and traditions were almost immediately taken over by the new empire. Most of what remains concerns secular achievements: great palaces, with one exception (the celebrated vaulted

hall of Ctesiphon) of mediocre construction, but lavishly covered with decorative stucco; rock reliefs and silver plate glorifying the power of the kings; and textiles presumably made in Iran and sold or imitated from Egypt to China. The main decorative patterns of *Sasanian* art that can be mentioned are the scroll vines and other wavy stems that after the Islamic conquest were called arabesque, pearl borders on medallions, royal symbols like pairs of wings or fluttering scarves, fighting lions and different animals like bulls. In spite of the limited remaining samples, it should not obscure the fact that at the time of the Muslim conquest it was one of the great arts of its period and, more specifically, the imperial art par excellence, in which everything was aimed at emphasizing the power of the King of Kings (Ghirshman, 1962; Harper, 1978, 1988).

On the other side, the Muslims conquered two of the wealthiest Byzantine provinces, Egypt and Greater Syria (including Palestine). Syria was a center of great imperial foundations, such as the Christian sanctuaries of the Holy Land. In North Africa and Spain, the pre-Islamic traditions may have been less vigorous, because of an unfortunate political history. The crucial point in dealing with the Christian art known to the newly arrived Muslims was the power and sophistication of the Byzantine ruler, the *malik al-Rum*. His painters were recognized as the greatest on Earth. Whenever an early Islamic building was held to be particularly splendid, contemporary or even later, legend asserted that the Byzantine emperors sent workers to execute it (Ettinghausen et al., 2001a).

The political and artistic importance of the two great empires of the pre-Islamic Near East should not overshadow the existence of other cultural and artistic traditions. Their Monuments are less clearly identified, but their importance is considerable because many of them became heavily Islamized or served as intermediaries between Islam and the rest of the world. An example is furnished by the Semitic populations of Syria and the upper Euphrates region. They were often supported by the *Sasanians* and affected by eastern traditions in art. In their midst, the early Muslims found many supporters and, most probably, converts. Through the monuments of *Dura-Europos, Palmyra, Hatra*, and the *Tur Abdin*, one can imagine what their great center, Edessa, must have been like, and it may be assumed that they had begun before the third century and continued most whole-heartedly the transformation of classical motifs and forms into abstract modes and decorative shapes which became a feature of Byzantine and Iranian art.

In addition, mention should be made of two peripheral regions, whose impact was more sporadic, at least at the beginning. The first is India, reached by the Muslims in the eighth century and soon a great goal for Islamic mercantilism as well as for centuries the proverbial exotic 'other'. The other is Central Asia, where Chinese, Indian, *Sasanian*, and even Western elements curiously blended with local *Soghdian* and *Kharizmian* features into an art at the service of many faiths (Manichaeism, Christianity, Buddhism, and *Mazdaism*) and of many local princes and merchants. (Azarpay, 1981).

Beyond its unity of formal and technical origin and its innumerable local variations, the art of the countries taken over by Islam shared several conceptual features. Much was at the service of faith and state. This point is significant because it was the *Sasanian* and Christian use of images that, in part, influenced Muslim attitudes towards representation. The very official nature of its iconography on silver plates or on stone reliefs strongly suggests that the *Sasanian* were more than mere images of some kind of reality; they were symbols of the kings themselves and of their dynasty.

Thus the conquering Arabs, with relatively few artistic traditions of their own and a limited visual culture, penetrated a world that was not only immensely rich in artistic themes and

forms yet universal in its vocabulary, but also, at this particular juncture of its history, had charged its forms with unusual intensity. The methodological and intellectual originality of Islamic art in its formative stages lies in its demonstration of the encounter between extremely complex and sophisticated uses of visual forms and a new religious and social system with no ideological doctrine requiring visual expression.

Only by approaching the subject in the geographical and chronological subdivision, In fact, the material culture found in each of the many Islamic countries bordering this sea can only be understood when viewed from this perspective, and any study of the art of this area that is not predicated on this unity will fail to identify the multitude of threads in the rich cultural tapestry of the particular early or medieval Islamic state being discussed and thus to comprehend its civilization fully (Bloom & Blair, 2009; Ettinghausen et al., 2001a). To reach the better understanding of genesis and evolution of Islamic art, especially wooden decorations, the Islamic land is geographically subdivided into three main parts: central Islamic lands, western Islamic lands, and eastern Islamic lands.

# 2.2. Central Islamic lands

Traditionally, the arts of the seventh to eleventh centuries in the central lands of the newly formed Islamic world have been divided into two periods defined by the ruling dynasties and, to a smaller degree, by the areas over which they governed. There is, thus, Umayyad art (661-750) centered on Greater Syria and Abbasid art (750-c.1000) centered in Iraq. In the former, the wealth and enthusiastic patronage of the ruling class gave rise to mosques and residences, which exhibited simultaneously a sense of state and an exuberance of life that reflected many different artistic sources and a broad range of tastes.

The architecture and the architectural decoration of the central lands of the Muslim world

during the first three centuries of its existence are the result of the encounter of the new Muslim faith and state with the ancient traditions of the Near East. Early Islamic civilization was both novel and traditional: novel in its search for intellectual, administrative, and cultural forms to fit new people and new ideas and attitudes; and traditional in seeking these forms in the world it conquered. Selective of its models, it combined them in an inventive way and slowly modified them, thereby creating a basis for later Islamic developments. With their capital in Damascus and their numerous military campaigns against Byzantium, the Umayyad were mostly aware of the Christian past of the Near East, but they were also fully conscious of being rulers of a huge empire. The east – Iran and Central Asia – provided the conquerors with most of their booty and their most vivid impressions of a new and fascinating world.

Settled in Iraq, a region of less significant pre-Islamic artistic wealth than the Mediterranean area, the Abbasids built on these Umayyad foundations without being restricted by local traditions of construction and craftsmanship (Ettinghausen et al., 2001d).

# 2.2.1. The art of the objects in Central Islamic lands

A detailed study of the decorative arts created in the central lands of the Muslim world during this seminal period is essential to the comprehension of most later artistic production in the Islamic world. Furthermore, a close look at the motifs and techniques shed light not only on the origins of this art but also on the time and place of its tentative beginnings. Such an examination helps to inform us as to what was immediately acceptable to the new Muslim patrons – how the *Sasanian* and Greco-Roman elements that were present in the various areas that came under Muslim domination and those elements that the Arabs themselves contributed from their own pre-Islamic culture were accumulated, sorted and

redistributed in a new way. The resulting novel combinations of old forms and techniques were to become inherent characteristics of Islamic art in general. Their origins in this highly complex and challenging formative period are obvious. We shall see that this cycle of adoption, adaptation and innovation was also repeated in other parts of the Muslim world during this creative epoch and that it was this cyclical repetition, more than anything else that was to set Islamic art on its particular and unique course for the next millennium.

The art created during the rule of the Umayyad dynasty seems to have been an art of adaptation and of juxtaposition. The rich vocabulary of forms current in the Late Antique world was adopted and adapted to the service of whatever new or old function was required, and a myriad of motifs and ideas drawn from the entire area under Umayyad rule and even from beyond were creatively juxtaposed. Fortunately, at this juncture in the study of Islamic art the decorative arts of the Umayyad period can be positively identified in a number of different media, and these can be used as firm anchors around which other similar works can be confidently gathered. The vocabulary of Umayyad art is based on four elements: abstract vegetal forms, geometric patterns, calligraphy, and figural decoration (Bloom et al., 1998).

The underside and outer face of the wooden beam of the Dome of the Rock is covered with a copper alloy fixed by large nails (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: Sheet-metal tie-beam covering in the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, completed 691 (Bloom et al., 1998)

This wooden beam is decorated in low relief with a vase at the center of the central axis. Out of the vase rises an interlaced, thick stem, forming several circles one beside the other. Leaves and grapes hang from the stem. Although the decoration represents natural vegetal motifs, yet the whole unit, and especially the scrolling interlaced stem, illustrates a conventionalized form.

The layout of the central band bordered on each side by a narrower band weaving a repetitive pattern is to be found on all such coverage of the arcade. However, this particular example exhibits motifs that are repeated often in many versions and media throughout the period not only in the central Islamic lands but in the eastern and the western as well, with echoes also in the subsequent medieval Islamic period. The stylized scrolls emerge from each side of center, ribbed alternately with a six-petal rosette and a cluster of grapes. This band is flanked on either side by an arcade alternately filled by two differing vegetal designs. A pearl border outlines the entire element as well as its central band.

We shall see that not only were such decorative bands with continuous vegetal motifs popular during the Umayyad period but so also were a multitude of geometric designs. Geometric design elements were probably adopted from the late Greco-Roman tradition, and, from the beginning, these patterns were adapted and developed, becoming vehicles for great diversity and ingenuity in the hands of the artists working under Muslim rule. In fact, no other culture used geometric repeat patterns in such inventive and imaginative ways. During the period covered here, we shall witness both the perpetuation of such designs, in general, throughout the Islamic world as well as the vogue for geometric window grilles, in particular, not only in the central Islamic lands but in the further Muslim lands as well (Dodds, 1992).

Vertically as opposed to horizontally oriented vegetal designs were also very popular in the central Islamic lands during the Umayyad period. The wooden soffit from the Aqsa Mosque (Figure 2.2) contains a *palmette* tree with its trunk positioned axially and giving rise to symmetrically arranged pairs of branches each scrolling to enclose a highly stylized leaf or grape cluster. One example is a stylized, linear, vegetal element that frames the panel. This so-called tree of life motif had its origin in the late classical tree, which was part of the Antique heritage.



Figure 2.2: Wooden soffit from Aqsa Mosque, Jerusalem, 86 x +6cm. Rockefeller Archeological Museum, Jerusalem (Art, 1993)

The decoration executed in carved wood during this period, as exemplified by the example just discussed, has a highly ornamental character betraying a decided preference for floral designs, usually executed in a fanciful and luxuriant manner (Creswell, 1961). Unlikely botanical combinations occur, such as vine leaves with pomegranates or cone-shaped fruits. This tendency towards the exuberant is held in check by a strong sense of rhythm and symmetry: the rich floral forms often riot within the framework of simple geometric figures – a circle, ellipse, diamond, a set of spirals, or possibly an arch on columns (Art, 1993; Ettinghausen et al., 2001a).

The Umayyad did, indeed, take their forms – architectural or decorative – and much of their iconography, from the world they conquered; and their art reflected the full scope of their empire. The traditions that were to shape Islamic art throughout the ages – mosque forms and parts, secular iconography and the conscious abandonment of religious imagery, new patterns, a tendency towards stylization and non-naturalistic treatment of vegetal forms – were established during this period.

As mentioned before, the early Islamic art was born in the world divided between two powerful empires – Byzantine and Persian. The first one absorbed the Mediterranean and the second spread from Central Asia to Yemen and from Eastern Anatolia to the upper Euphrates. The Byzantium represented Greco-Roman cultural tradition and Persia the *Sasanian* artistic traditions that influenced the art of the world a lot. With the spread of Islam, "initially at least, those artists who had worked under *Sasanian* or Byzantine patronage continued to work in their own indigenous styles but for Muslim patrons. The first examples of Islamic art therefore rely on earlier techniques, styles, and forms reflecting this blending of classical and Iranian decorative themes and motifs.

The direct impact of the new faith and of its social as well as ethical requirements on the early Islamic arts is the complex set of modifications called simplification, abstraction, and stylization. The effect of these modifications has been subsumed under the term "arabesque". The special position taken by or given to the arabesque, whether it is meant as a form or as a concept, could be understood as direct or indirect reflections of the brilliant intellectual life of Iraq in two ways. One is that both form and concept reflected or expressed the formalization of a legal structure, the prevailing legal order for making decisions or for passing judgments. Legal structure was, like ornament, logically constructed and could be extended to any personal and social need. The other way is through the permeation of all Muslim societies with ideas, Muslim or not in origin, which gave these societies a distinctive character of their own. Such is the notion of God as the exclusive Creator, and, therefore, the vanity of all visible things and the possibility of unexpected combinations of details that appear to the modern eye as stunning inventions. This procedure has been called atomism and has often been used to explain the originality of early Islamic art. A second way is geometry, whose investigation has been fashionable during the past decades and which was indeed one of the more remarkable developments of ninth- and tenth-century. Muslim thought, geometry, was a technique with straightforward and clear rules; it may thus have acquired the additional ideological component of reflecting Abbasid order. The full impact of geometry on the arts belongs in reality to the following centuries, although, as we shall see, some curious beginnings took place in northeastern Iran in the tenth century (Ettinghausen et al., 2001a).

Abbasid art, with a few exceptions in the courtly art of Samarra, can be characterized as a purification and simplification of the Umayyad inheritance. There is, at first glance, an austerity and a severity to most Abbasid decorated walls, wooden panels, and objects of all

sorts. Figural representations are few and far between, and it has been argued in the past that Abbasid art, like Abbasid culture in general (Allen, 1988), marks the end of the line for the great 'Hellenistic' vision which had dominated the Mediterranean and western Asia since the fourth century B.C.E. The caned panel from a door or *minbar* of *Mashatta* (Figure 2.3) shows, especially in the central square and rectangular sections, how the Late Antique vine scroll gradually evolved into a pattern so highly stylized that with very little adjustment it could become an infinite repeat pattern (Jenkins, 1983).



Figure 2.3: Wood panel from door or *minbar*, ht. 1. 79. Metropolitan .Museum of art, New York (Ratliff & Evans, 2012)

The rectangular carved panel that originally functioned as one of the sides of a large chest or cenotaph not only illustrates the progressive stylization of adopted and adapted Greco-Roman motifs, it also shows the purely *Sasanian* wing motif being superimposed on a Late Antique vine scroll (Moritz, 1905; Ratliff & Evans, 2012).

The next step in the evolutionary process we have been following *vis-a-vis* early Islamic woodworking is to be seen on those objects exhibiting the so-called beveled style. Its earliest beginnings in Iraq have already been discussed in connection with a type of stucco wall decoration utilized at Samarra – beginnings that are also associated with the origins of the arabesque (Kühnel, 1977). Arabesque motifs were adopted in the Abbasid heartland

during this early period not only in stucco but also in wood and stone. This convention soon spread to *Tulunid* Egypt, and it can be found in numerous Muslim countries not only with the early Muslim art patrons but with their successors as well (Creswell, 1968). Most of the motifs on the earliest woodcarvings in the beveled style from *Tulunid* Egypt were identical with those of their Iraqi prototypes, although some tendencies became more pronounced (Figure 2.4). At times, there was a marked effort to break up the rather broad sculptured masses into smaller elements and to add secondary surface decoration in the focal areas. Certain small units were frequently used, and a rounded leaf seen from the side became a stereotyped motif. A few features had no counterpart in Samarra, at least so far as is known. The designs, especially in small narrow panels, thus appear as free, asymmetrical compositions. Keeping within the general character of the style, they are abstract, yet can be clearly recognized as related to the floral or vase motifs from Samarra in the beveled style (Grabar, 1992). Their arbitrary and unnatural character is further underscored by the fact that certain parts, for instance the beak, can turn into floral forms.



Figure 2.4: Pair of doors, Wood (teak); carved, 9th century, Iraq, probably Samarra; Iraq, *Takrit*, H. 221 cm, W. 51.4 cm, Fletcher Fund, 1931 (Ekhtiar, 2011)

#### 2.3. Western Islamic lands

The only survivor of the Abbasid massacre of Umayyad princes in 750 was *Abd* al-*Rahman ibn Mu'awiya*, who escaped to *al-Andalus*. He succeeded in becoming an independent governor. Until 1009 his descendants ruled nearly three-quarters of the Iberian Peninsula that was controlled by the Muslims.

By the time of *Abd al-Rahim II* (r. 833-52), a significant Muslim culture had developed in and around the southern cities of Seville and Cordoba or in the old *Visigothic* (The *Visigothic* Kingdom was a kingdom that occupied what is now southwestern France and the Iberian Peninsula from the 5th to the 8th centuries) capital of Toledo. Umayyad power reached its apogee in the tenth century, under *Abd al-Rahman* III and his son *al-Hakam* (r. 912-76). At that time, the Umayyad of Spain assumed the title of caliphs and their capital, Cordoba, became one of the wealthiest and most brilliant cities of the medieval word. In many ways, the Umayyad caliphate of Spain was the single most powerful cultural center of Europe, with a strong impact on the large Christian and Jewish population within and without *al-Andalus*.

During the early centuries of Islamic rule, the cultural history of western Islamic lands was concentrated in two areas. One being the province of *Ifriqiya* under the rule of the *Aghlabid* dynasty of governors, with its new capital of *Qayrawan* and its fortified coastal cities like *Sus* (modern Sousse). The other being *al-Andalus* which was the generic name given to all parts of the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim rule. The former was still very much of a cultural satellite of the caliphate in Syria and in Iraq. The latter, however, created a culture and art that were strikingly original between the two fledgling dynasties of the *Idrisids*, who had founded the city of Fez and had fully established itself in what would be now

northeastern Morocco and northwestern Algeria. Sicily had been conquered in the ninth century.

#### 2.3.1. The art of the objects in Western Islamic lands

Up to now and with the exception of *al-Andalus*, the arts created during this formative period in the western lands of the Islamic world, the *Maghrib*, if they are mentioned at all, have usually been discussed as part of either the Abbasid or the Fatimid traditions.

The cycle of adoption, adaptation and innovation it has been followed in the decorative arts created in the central Islamic Lands during this early period was echoed in various contemporary artistic centers in the western reaches of the Muslim world. The art that evolved in the *Maghrib* during this formative epoch owed a great debt to three different sources. The first of these was the Greco-Roman, a heritage common to all the Islamic countries on the shores of the Mediterranean. Having been the prevailing tradition in the area at the time of the Arab conquests, in the early Islamic period many of its features were adopted and gradually adapted for the new patrons.

The second source was the artistic styles and traditions that developed under the aegis of the caliphates ruling from Damascus and Baghdad. More specifically, the rulers who governed the *Maghrib* during the early Islamic period were constantly attempting to emulate and even surpass the life styles of the Umayyad and Abbasids. The same effect was achieved when techniques and styles, newly developed in the heartland, were carried to other areas by migrating craftsmen who were seeking work or were summoned by more prosperous patrons. Thus, the major centers within the central Islamic lands during this period should be viewed as at the hub of a wheel. The spokes of this wheel radiated to the furthest reaches of the Muslim world bearing kernels of the newly evolving art form known today as Islamic. Once having been adopted in these 'further' lands, the cycle was repeated with the local habitants adapting the styles from the heartland to suit their own needs by adding elements familiar to them, and, thus, eventually creating a Western version of classical early Islamic art.

The last major indebtedness was to the contemporary 'Mediterranean society' itself. It has been stated that the Mediterranean has always been a unifying force for the countries that surround it.

A major work of this period in the western lands of the Islamic world is the wood *minbar* in the Great Mosque of *Qayrawan* (Figure 2.5); crafted between 856 and 863, it is the oldest surviving pulpit in the Islamic world, exhibiting a rich variety of designs directly based on Umayyad work. Whereas the more significant floral compositions go back to the carvings at Mashatta and other sites, except for some new Abbasid stylistic tendencies now being more pronounced. All concern for natural growth and botanical veracity had disappeared, to be replaced by an emphasis on abstract floral fantasies. Trees, leaves, and fruits of diverse species are shown on the same plant; branches twist in odd, even geometric shapes or have been left out altogether; and familiar forms turn unexpectedly into others. The so-called tree of life decoration – which had its origin in the Mesopotamian and Persian pre Islamic art – is highly reminiscent of the depictions of the same motif on a number of remaining objects. The imperial and Andalusian Umayyad examples also each exhibit a border of small, interconnected and repeated vegetal designs. The tree of life motif proved to be a particularly popular one in *al-Andalus*, especially for architectural decoration, and its variations are legion. Although purely decorative elements are comparatively rare, their richly sculptured surfaces stand out effectively against the deep shadows of the background, and the same elements appear in different compositions. Such versatility bears

witness to rich imagination and inner dynamic force, but the piling up of forms, the unexpected combinations, and the ever-changing juxtapositions, as well as the lack of any close relation between the geometric and floral panels, betray an endeavor that was still unfocused. Although outwardly the artisans had their designs in admirable control, the balance, even spacing, and formal unity in each thematic group show that they were still groping for both the syntax and the vocabulary of the newly developing decorative language. The only definite conclusion that can be drawn is that artistic expression tended to be achieved through non-naturalistic and abstract motifs (Baker, 1992).



Figure 2.5: Detail of wood minbar in Great Mosque, Oayrawan. Datable between 856 and 863 (Husband, 1998)

Although the objects were made at a time when Samarra was the Abbasid capital, the style of its canings reflects the Mediterranean world of artistic forms rather than that of western Asia. This remoteness and distinct cultural tradition explain a time when some artisans of the capital were half-heartedly following old traditions and others had already experimented with new ideas; their fellow-craftsmen in Mediterranean centers were employing the ancient vocabulary with renewed vigor.



**Figure 2.6:** Panels of wood *minbar* from Mosque of the *Andalusians*, Fez. dated 369/980. Right panel: 55 x 20.JCm. Left panel: 56 x 20.5cm. *Musee du Batha*, *Pcz* (Dodds et al., 1992)

One pulpit produced in Fez (Figure 2.6) was ordered in 980 for the Mosque of the *Andalusian* in that city by the Fatimid client *Buluggin ibn Ziri*. This *minbar* also drew its inspiration from the artistic styles and traditions that had developed under the aegis of the Umayyad caliphate ruling from Damascus. Two carved panels seen here still retain traces of the original paint, each bear as the principal decoration a high stylized *palmette* tree set within an arch and circumscribed by an angular, foliated inscription (Chitsazian, 2007). Because the vegetal motif itself (adapted from the late classical candelabra tree) was part of the Late Antique heritage of early Islamic art, a precise answer to the route this design took to Morocco – the time of its arrival and incorporation into the iconographic repertoire there remains elusive. It could have passed into the repertoire of the artisans of Fez directly from Greater Syria just as easily as from Greater Syria via *al-Andalus* or from Baghdad via *Ifriqiya*.

Carved ivory objects from *al-Andalus* that survive in substantial quantity must be regarded as among the finest products of the period, fully commensurate with the stately and imaginative opulence revealed by the architectural monuments of Umayyad Spain. In the *pyxis* made in 968 for *al-Mughira*, human and animal figures enclosed in large, eight-lobed medallions are formed from a continuous interlace, while other figures and plant forms fill the spandrels (Figure 2.7). The vegetal forms are somewhat richer than before and the opulent ornamental design is endowed with lively movement. Equally important is the artist's sense of structure, which resulted in a clear organization of the surface. The branches form geometric compartments, which serve both as skeletons for the composition and as frames. Geometric and vegetal motifs are thus harmonized not by mere juxtaposition but by integration, a solution that the earlier wood-carvers had not yet achieved.

This piece is also the first appearance on Spanish ivory of a cycle of royal themes. In one of the medallions the prince himself appears with a goblet or bottle in his right hand and a long-stemmed flower in his left; he is seated in the company of his fan-bearer and his *lutenist* while falconers stand outside the medallion frame; other motifs representing royal might, like the lions below the throne platform and the symmetrical arrangement of lions attacking bulls in a second medallion, can be traced to Mesopotamian or Persian origins. Still other designs are simply decorative. As many of the motifs on this *pyxis* occur in pairs flanking axial trees, Islamic or Byzantine textiles showing an ultimately *Sasanian* organization may have served as models, but the originally flat patterns have now been successfully transformed into richly modulated reliefs. Furthermore, the sculptural quality is enhanced by the now greater density of the designs. Both the function of such ivories and the degree to which they were appreciated can be deduced from the inscription on a *pyxis* with purely vegetal designs (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1999).



Figure 2.7: Ivory pvxis. Dated 357/968. Ht. 15cm. *Musee du Louvre*, Paris (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1999)

Three clearly visible strands stand out in the creation of the western Islamic land formal identity. One is the vast vocabulary of Antique and Late Antique construction, and decoration, which was available in Spain and in most of North Africa. Another strand is the memory of, at times nostalgia for, the Umayyad world of Syria, even though the actual forms of Syria are less clearly visible than the idea of these forms, as is so apparent in the Syrian names given to *Andalusian* sites and buildings. What are missing there, in spite of written sources to the contrary, are the ways of the ninth and tenth-century Baghdad. Finally, there is the impact of the various regions of the Mediterranean society of the early middle Ages, whose components are only beginning to emerge.

## 2.4. Eastern Islamic lands

The history and culture of Iran and central Asia during the first centuries of Islamic rule are difficult to sketch succinctly and clearly. Nominally, this vast area consisted of several provinces ruled by governors appointed in Baghdad. From the ninth century, however, dynasties of governors, such as the Arab *Tahirids* (821-73), the native Iranian *Samanids* (819-1005) descended from pre-Islamic nobility, and the more populist *Saffarids* (867-963),

exercised effective control over large areas without neatly established frontiers. For most of this period only a few important Muslim cities were in western Iran, like the future *Isfahan* or *Qum*, the latter having acquired quite early a holy association with *Sh'ism*. The main Muslim centers were in the huge province of *Khurasan*, with its four great cities of *Nishapur*, *Merv*, *Herat*, and *Balkh*, and in the frontier area of *Transoxiana*, with Bukhara and Samarqand, the heartland of pre-Islamic *Soghdian* culture. Several minor local dynasties flourished in the mountains of northern Iran, and out of one of them emerged the *Buyid* dynasty (932-1062), which occupied Baghdad itself in 945 and relegated the caliphs to be mere figureheads. A crucial role at the crossroads between all these areas was played by *Rayy*, near modern, *Tehran*, which was for several centuries the main administrative and political center of Iran (Frye, 1975).

#### 2.4.1. The art of the object

This formative period in the eastern reaches of the Muslim world is, as in the central and western Islamic lands, basically, one in which longstanding artistic traditions were combined with newly adopted ones and both then adapted to new requirements, after some experimentation.

Naturally, these requirements varied from medium to according to the strength of the tradition in each and the new demands that each had now to fill. To understand this searching for new artistic possibilities, the various media will be discussed serially, so that the specific achievement of each will become clear.

Although, there is no evidence of wooden objects belonging to that period, the general character of the artistic works that were made in the early Islamic era in eastern Islamic land were reviewed.

Of the two major areas, eastern and western Iran, the former seems to have been more creative, both in design and in the range of artistic production. There the most common and perhaps artistically the most outstanding objects were the ceramic wares.

How this vast production began and the precise stages in its development are unknown. The objects themselves show, however, that inspiration came from at least three quarters; but, in adapting designs and techniques to a new spirit and to indigenous materials, the artists often achieved quite different esthetic effects.

The source of inspiration was the *Sasanian* royal art, especially the designs on silver plates. One of the most common types of decoration was the central figure, which figures animals alternating with plump birds on a ground of rosettes and groups of repeating Arabic letters. The other type included the fauna motifs in which all the motifs, but particularly the birds and floral patterns, were copied closely from Sassanid period metal works (Figure 2.8). Another type of design was created from full and half *palmettes*. However, in most of the samples, the Sassanid sources of art for metal work decoration were still used (Pope et al., 1964b).



**Figure 2.8:** Bowl Iran, *Nishapur* Bowl, 10th century Ceramic; Vessel, Earthenware, underglaze slip-painted, 3 1/4 x 8 5/8 in. (8.26 x 21.91 cm) A collection of over 230 ceramic objects (vessels) at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) Art of the Middle East: Islamic Department (*Pope et al., 1964b*).

# 2.5. Medieval period

#### 2.5.1. Historic and cultural setting

The Muslim world in the first decades of the eleventh century was in a state of political confusion and of social and cultural tension. In short, from Spain to central Asia, a more or less generally accepted hierarchy of authority had broken down into dozens of separate and often independent centers of power.

From the Christian West in the eleventh century, when pressure increased on Muslim Spain from still disorganized local barons; Sicily was lost to the Normans; and, finally, in 1099 Jerusalem was taken and the Latin Kingdom established in Syria and Palestine.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Muslim world responded vigorously and successfully, though diversely and at different moments, to these external threats and internal divisions and confusion. There are clear movements of ideas and of practices from one area to another and more or less concerted programs of reform can be established for

almost the whole of Islam. At times, the epithet Seljuk is given to this period, after the most important Turkic dynasty of the time, but they hardly affected western Islamic lands. This period is called the 'Medieval' period, as it stands between the formative centuries of adapting a new faith to an old land and the centuries that followed the Mongol invasions and defined the modern world of Islam. The cultural achievements of Islam's Middle Ages are as striking as its political and military successes, and the great syntheses arrived at between internal trends and movements affected the culture of Muslim lands for many centuries to come.

The end of this period is much easier to define than its beginning. The brutal Mongol invasion penetrated into eastern Iran in the second decade of the thirteenth century and advanced westwards, destroying Baghdad and the Abbasid caliphate in 1258, only to he stopped in southern Syria in 1260 by the *Mamluks* of Egypt, a new power rising from the collapse of the *Ayyubids* (Ettinghausen et al., 2001c).

#### 2.5.2. Central Islamic lands

The presentation of the medieval arts in central Islamic lands has been divided into two sections. The first section deals with the rule of the Fatimid dynasty, which began in *Ifriqiya* (present-day Tunisia) around 908, moved its capital to Egypt in 969 under the leadership of the brilliant caliph al-Mu'izz, and ruled from there an area of shifting frontiers, which at its time of greatest expanse, extended from central Algeria to northern Syria, the middle Euphrates valley, and the holy places of Arabia. Its much diminished authority is affected by internal dissensions and by the Crusades, which was eliminated by Saladin in 1171. The dynasties dependent on them vanished from North Africa by 1159, while Sicily had been conquered by the Normans in 1071.

The second section focuses on the art of the whole area in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (at least until 1260), but only on its eastern part, essentially the Mesopotamian valley, in the eleventh.

## 2.5.2.1. The art of objects in the Fatimid period in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria

The Fatimid period is of singular importance as the era when Egypt reached an outstanding position in the Muslim world, not only as the focal point of vast trading activities extending as far as Spain in the west and India in the east (as well as outside the Islamic regions) but also as a great manufacturing center. The arts and crafts were very highly specialized during that epoch. Production for the lower and middle class was on a very large scale. The most striking feature of the arts under Fatimid rule was the establishment of Egypt, and more particularly of the newly created city of Cairo, as a major center for artistic activities.

The designs include vegetal as well as geometric and epigraphic motifs, almost always in relief leaving the stone background visible. It may be that some of the devices, such as pentagrams or the heavily decorated medallions which occasionally replace the horizontal bands, had a symbolic significance. A last point about early Fatimid decoration is that it was not limited to stucco or stone. Wood was common, although little has remained in situ.

Their technical quality indicates that the older traditions picked up by the Muslim world in Byzantium were not yet totally lost or that, especially in Jerusalem, the *Fatimids* were reviving Late Antique techniques they knew as *Umayyad*.

The most vivid and also the most sumptuous picture of this period is provided by historical accounts, both contemporary and later, reporting on an event during the reign of *al-Mustansir* (r. 1036-94). There was an immensely rich treasury of furniture, carpets, curtains, and wall coverings, many embroidered in gold, often with designs incorporating birds and

quadrupeds, kings and their notables, and even a whole range of geographical vistas. Unfortunately, relatively few of these objects have survived.

There is one exception to the pattern that has been following up to now in this investigation, namely, the cycle of adoption, adaptation and innovation, as regards the objects created for the *Fatimids* after their conquest of Egypt in 969. At first, the artists working under the aegis of this dynasty seem to have continued to explore the possibilities inherent in forms long current in Egypt or more recently imported from the East. Only gradually do they seem to have introduced new decorative elements that had begun evolving in the western Islamic lands during the previous, early Islamic, period under Umayyad, Abbasid, and indigenous influences. Once this innovative phase began, artistic problems were approached in an entirely new spirit.

As regards wood, treasured in Egypt because of its scarcity, early in the Fatimid period we can witness the continued popularity of the beveled style first encountered in the Abbasid heartland and later in Egypt. The panel of a wooden door in the mosque of al-Hakim, dated 1010 (Figure 2.9), is still based on the true Abbasid Style but it is also illustrative of a further development of that style in that the lines delineating the rather restricted number of motifs are wider, thus giving quite a different impression. Unlike the prototype, here the distinction between pattern and interstitial spaces is clearly defined. The panels are ornamented with carved vegetal motifs in low relief. These decorations clearly reveal the particularities of the early Fatimid style of woodcarving, a style of slanted, beveled engraving. It may be observed that the decorative elements assume the form of vegetal stems, marked by their length, and the use of decoration in the form of bi-segmented palm fronds. It should also be noted that the decorative vocabulary includes a new design motif, in the form of a kidney-shaped blossom developed from the winged leaf like *Sasanian*  decorations. Thus, the door of Imam al-Hakim sheds light on the development of Islamic woodcarving and assists in the dating of some other wooden objects of the period.

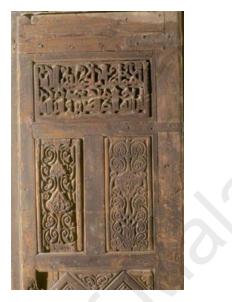


Figure 2.9: Wooden door leaf. Dated 1010, Ht. about 3.25 m. W. 2m, Fatimid period, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Jenkins, 1976)

By the third quarter of the eleventh century, however, a further evolution is discernible. The beveled elements are reduced to thin, spiraling stems against a deeply carved background, and figural and animal designs begin to come to the fore. The early stages of this innovative trend are well illustrated by the panel (Figure 2.10). Although the vegetal and figural designs can here be interpreted as being given equal treatment, the former motifs are beginning to be relegated to the background, and pride of place is moving toward the *zoomorphized* split *palmette*, Instead of starkly abstract, static, and purely sculptural qualities, there is now a dramatic interplay between abstract and more realistic parts, between elements conceived three-dimensionally and purely linear ones, and between light and shadow. In addition, there is a new sense of movement.



Figure 2.10: Detail of wood panel. Datable to 58, L 3'45 X Hr. 30 cm. Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo (Jenkins, 1976)

Particularly important among these panel and others in the Museum of Islamic arts of Cairo is a series of horizontally oriented caned wooden boards – some with decoration organized in interlaced cartouches containing designs of animals and human figures all carved against a background of formalized vine scrolls in lower relief (Figure 2.11) and others with a symmetrically arranged animal decoration (Figure 2.12).



Figure 2.11: Wood panel from door. Datable to c.1058, Ht. 34.9cm; W. 22.9cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Jenkins, 1976)



**Figure 2.12:** Panel with horse heads, Fatimid period (909–1171), 11th century, Egypt, L. 13 3/4 in (34.9 cm), W. 8 15/16 in (22.7 cm), D. 11/16 in (1.7 cm), Rogers Fund, 1911 (Jenkins, 1976).

This panel, probably from a wooden door, is deeply carved with two horse heads in relief. Attention to detail is evident in the beaded bands and bridles amid arabesques. The piece was carved to different depths in order to produce a pleasing chiaroscuro effect, a technique mastered by Fatimid woodworkers.

Although the earliest extant datable woodwork with figural decoration from Muslim Egypt is from the third quarter of the eleventh century, architectural elements with such ornamentation were being utilized in *Fatimid Ifriqiya* more than one hundred years earlier. Thus, the vogue for carved wooden architectural elements with figural decoration may have been concurrent with that for the vegetal decoration that was evolving from the beveled style.

It has been suggested that the new imagery with its animation and fully realized observation of the details of everyday living that we have seen in the ornamentation of wood and ivory objects during the Fatimid period reflected developments that occurred first in painting (Jenkins, 1972).

# 2.5.2.2. The *Saljuqs*, *Artuqids*, *Zangids*, and *Ayyuhids* in Iraq, Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt

In contrast to early Islamic times, it is not possible, at the present stage of research and interpretation, to provide a single, continuous, chronological account of medieval (eleventh to thirteenth centuries) art and architecture in the central Islamic lands that were not under Fatimid rule. Therefore, art characteristics according to definable areas of shared power and culture are identified. The *Seljuq* rule in Anatolia or *Ayyubid* control of Egypt and the Levant led to a recognizable form of art. Therefore, we present these lands in terms of two geographical regions with partly interlocking dynastic histories: Syria with Palestine and Egypt as well as a brief foray into Yemen and Anatolia. Although the chronological sequence will suffer, it is possible to argue that during a politically complicated period such as this one, art consistency lies in lands rather than in rulers.

# 2.5.2.3. Syria, Palestine and Egypt

The *Zangid* and *Ayyubid* princes who assumed control in Muslim Syria from various petty local dynasts first succeeded in ejecting the Crusaders from Edessa in the *Jazira* (1146), then took over Egypt (1171), and finally pushed the Crusaders back until, by the time of the Mongol invasion in 1258-60, only a few fortresses remained in Christian hands in Syria and Palestine, and a constantly diminishing Armenian kingdom barely subsisted in Cilicia (now south central Turkey).

These were memorable centuries for Islamic art in Syria. The two old cities of Aleppo and Damascus were totally revitalized, and small and at times almost abandoned towns and villages were transformed into major centers (Ettinghausen et al., 2001d).

Many outstanding carved wooden objects are extant or known from the central Islamic

lands during this period. By incorporating both certain principles of the abstract style of Abbasid with elements met with on Fatimid wooden pieces. Syria's function as a bridge between the east on the one hand, and Egypt and the western Islamic lands, on the other, can be clearly discerned. For decorating the wooden objects they used the deeply carved motifs to produce a carefully planned lacework of spiraling, bifurcating, and intersecting stems, all of the same width. In their clarity and formality these coiling stems, which produce few leaves or flowers, are remote from natural forms. They cross and re-cross the arched configuration of the fillet 'which is no longer a boundary but a melody running through a fugue'. This apt description emphasizes the innate musical quality of the design. Decoration in Syria and Egypt was, on the whole, remarkable for its sobriety and simplicity. It was limited to gates, where single sculpted panels were often put on the walls around the entrance; to plaques and bands of writing, using Quranic quotations or established formulas to point out the purpose of the building and the glory of its founder to the elaborate stone or stucco grilles of windows and oculi; and to mihrabs in wood (Figure 2.13), stone, stucco, or the peculiarly characteristic new technique of marble incrustation. Themes were traditional, including arcades, classical and early Christian motifs reused from older buildings, or further developments on the Fatimid geometry based on star patterns. Three newer features are particularly significant. The first is a motif of interlacing heavy lines, varying in the complexity of their geometry and in the relationship between right angles and curves, which create a strong and immediate visual effect. The motif reflects a simpler and ruder tradition and taste than the minute arabesques of Fatimid times, but its influence was to be quite strong in Anatolia and in *Mamluk* Egypt.



Figure 2.13: Inlaid-painted wood, Allepo, Syria, *Ayyubid* period, Madrassa *Halawiye*, 1245, (Ettinghausen et al., 2001d)

The second characteristic theme is writing, often used in conjunction with floral motifs. Like contemporary objects, architecture bore both angular, somewhat artificially archaizing inscriptions and the more common cursive ones. Like contemporary sculpture in Western cathedrals, the epigraphy both illustrates the purpose of the building and emphasizes its main axes and lines, reflecting the expressive value and meaning of a monument (Figure 2.14).



Figure 2.14: Panel, probably 13th century, Syria, Carved wood with traces of pigments and gilt, H. 4 1/2 in (11.4 cm), W. 47 in (119.4 cm) (Panel, 2006)

This long, narrow panel, certainly part of an architectural frieze running along the interior of a secular building, presents a neat cursive calligraphy set against a busy scrolling-vegetal background. The calligraphic inscription, a rather standard text on secular objects in all media, may have been dedicated to the patron of the building in which this panel was once installed. The extant sentence can be translated as "perpetual glory, lasting fortune, lucky destiny, continuous prosperity.

The third motif involves the windows and medallions used on *qibla* walls, domes, and facades, geometric in Syria, but often incorporating magnificent floral arabesques of leaves and stems. Related though they are to the Fatimid or Iranian themes, the main quality of these complex designs is their remarkable clarity, which enables the eye to catch the major lines of the movement without being bored with endless repetition. Such arabesques do not have the wealth of their Iranian or Iraqi counterparts, but they make up for the consistent simplicity of their designs by their elegance and restraint (Figure 2.15).



Figure 2.15: Aleppo, Halawiva Mosque, twelfth century. Mihrab, Ayubbid, Syria, 1245, (Blair & Bloom, 1995)

Zangid and Ayyubid Syria was the second of the Muslim regions after Iran to evolve a great medieval art and architecture. Syria must nevertheless be singled out for the variety of its constructions, the growth of military architecture, the incorporation of motifs and techniques from the east and from the north, the importance of cities in determining the size and type of buildings, and the transformations given to the *muqarnas*. Many of these features reflect the religious and cultural needs of the time and illustrate phenomena wider than either Syria or the Arab world (Blair & Bloom, 1995).

# 2.5.2.4. Egypt in the *Mamluk* period

Egypt's position in the Muslim, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean worlds falls into three major phases. In an age when the Mongol invasions left Iran, Iraq, and Anatolia in political turmoil and economic collapse, when the Byzantine Empire was crumbling before Turkish and Latin onslaughts and Europe had yet to emerge from the fragmentation of its feudal era, the *Mamluk* regime emerged as one of the strongest and most stable of Muslim Middle Eastern and Mediterranean states. The *Mamluks* expelled the remaining Crusader principalities from Palestine and Syria, defended Syria and Egypt against Mongol invasions, and extended their power to the Cilician Gates and to the upper Euphrates valley in order to defend them against renewed invasions. By 1323, the *Mamluks*, by a treaty with *Abu Sa'id*, ended hostilities with the *Il-Khanid* state of Anatolia and Iran on terms favorable to the security of Syria and Egypt.

Migrant workers in metal, textiles, ceramics, glass, and the building crafts revived *Mamluk* industry. Metalworkers from Mosul, for example, created a flourishing industry of inlaid brass, and architects from Tabriz worked in Damascus in the 1330s. Patterns for ceramics came from Sultanabad; silk designs from Iran; geometric motifs from Iran and Anatolia. The Baghdadi and Mesopotamian tradition of illuminated manuscripts was continued in early *Mamluk* copies of Automata, *Kalila wa Dimna*, and *Maqamat*. The *Mamluks* also inherited the astronomical traditions of *Rakka* and Damascus as well as of Fatimid Cairo.

Alongside royal art, the *Mamluks* cultivated a commitment to religion. The most striking expression of the *Mamluk* commitment to Islam was the construction of great numbers of mosques, colleges, Sufi *khanqahs*, and other religious buildings. The patronage of religious institutions also inspired auxiliary arts. Building parts, including *mihrabs*, portals, windows, screens, shutters, and cupboards, display splendid achievements in metal, wood, and stonework. Religious furniture, including *minbars* and *kursls* (Quran stands), inspired fine metals and woodwork. Marble paneling was an important decorative feature for the *mihrab* and *qibla* walls of mosques, and was also used for pavements and fountains. Other furnishings included candlesticks, Koran boxes, doors, windows, and glass lamps.

Full understanding of religious art in the *Mamluk* period will require a combination of arthistorical, textual, and religious studies, going far beyond the study of inscriptions found on buildings and objects, in order to bring alive our insight into the meaning and uses of any particular object or building.

Before the *Mamluk* period, Egyptian art showed little interest in geometric designs; most Islamic geometric design was Iranian. However, the first hundred years of *Mamluk* rule brought a vast explosion of geometric decoration in Egypt. This decoration was at first based on patterns coming from Iran and Anatolia, but, after 1350 Egypt, became the pioneer Muslim region in the development of new patterns and in the use of geometrical decoration for architectural surfaces, Koran manuscripts, and mosque furniture. Geometric decoration seems to be a prime Egyptian contribution to Islamic art (Lapidus, 1984).

Several wooden samples belonging to the *Mamluk* period show the splendid wooden art of that era. One is a wooden panel that was carved with an arabesque decoration that is symmetrical in the vertical axis. The decoration consists of a complicated network of

*palmettes*, tendrils, and strings of beads in four different layers against the flat ground. The panel comes from the great *minbar* (pulpit) that the *Mamluk sultan al-Mansur Husam al-Din Lajin* had erected in the *Ibn Tulun* Mosque in Cairo in 1296 (Figure 2.16). The sides of the some four-meter-high *minbar* were covered with panels of different shapes that together formed a complicated geometric pattern consisting of several hundred parts. All of these panels were carved with various types of arabesque.



Figure 2.16: Octagonal panel, carved sycamore, Egypt, Cairo; 1296, Diam: 27.5 cm, (Lapidus, 1984)

Moreover, a *minbar* or *pulpit*, was found dating back to the *Mamluk* period that consists of geometric motifs. The wooden sample consists of a podium reached by stairs with doors, such as those at its base. They are used in mosques by imams, prayer leaders, to deliver the sermon at the main service of the week, at noon on Friday. These doors exhibit a great variety of patterns, most of which are also found in other media, such as stone carvings, marble mosaics, and stucco window grilles. The accurate cutting required to make such patterned objects is remarkable, since every piece affects the whole. Comparative material in the Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, suggests that these doors come from the *minbar* (pulpit) of the mosque of the emir *Sayf al-Din Qawsun* (d. 1342), the powerful Cupbearer of Sultan *al-Nasir ibn Qala'un*. (Figure 2.17) (Lapidus, 1984).



Figure 2.17: Pair of doors, 1325–30, Egypt, Cairo, Wood (rosewood and mulberry); carved, inlaid with carved ivory, ebony, and other woods, H. 77 1/4 in (196.2 cm) W. 35 in (88.9 cm) D. 1 3/4 in (4.4 cm) (Art, 2012)

## 2.5.2.5. Anatolia

The battle of *Manzikert* opened Anatolia (known in medieval Islamic sources as al-Rum) to Islam in 1071, but it is not until the turn of the thirteenth century that the *Seljuqs* of Rum and many relatives of ruling princes or government officials were sufficiently established to engage in major building activities. They only indirectly affected by the Mongol conquests, except for the refugees from Iran and Iraq who poured into Anatolia. The *Seljuks* of Rum did not disappear from the scene until the beginning of the fourteenth century, when internal dissensions gave rise to a number of more or less independent principalities. A further peculiarity of *Seljuk* Rum was its cultural, social, and ethnic make-up. As a newly conquered Islamic province, it counted many non-Muslims and recent converts, with the twin consequences of eclecticism and of a wide range of cultural components, especially from the Christian Caucasus. As a frontier area, it attracted Muslim militants, from ghazi (militant) warriors to the adherents of mystical Sufi orders.

The Mongol invasion forced artisans working in the former country to seek new patrons. It is well documented that some of them found their way to Anatolia, and thus the possibility of Persian artists influencing Anatolian production in general is quite plausible.

The wood-carvers' art is also beautifully represented in *Seljuk* Anatolia. An outstanding example is the folding wooden Qur'an stand (Figure 2.18) made, according to its elegant cursive inscriptions, in 1279 for the tomb of the mystic poet and saint Jalal al-Din Rumi in Konya. The four outer surfaces, all originally painted and gilded, are each carved with a rhythmic arabesque composition (Riefstahl, 1933).

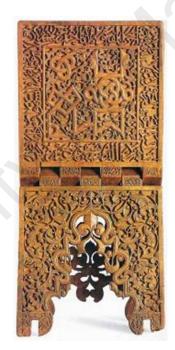


Figure 2.18: wood Quran stand dated 1279, H 94.5 cm. Berlin museum for *islamishe kunst* (Ettinghausen et al., 2001b)

On three similarly decorated doors, one from the *Haci Hasan* Mosque in Ankara, another from the public soup kitchen (Turkish imaret) of *Ibrahim Bey* in *Karaman* and the third, now in the Museum for *Islamische Kunst* in Berlin from an unknown building (Figure 2.19), the basic repertory of arabesques and inscriptions is enriched by an infinite repeat

pattern in the large central medallion. In addition, despite the religious and public settings of the doors, there are bold representations of confronted lions and griffins, as well as of paired dragons and frontally oriented human figures that are also highly reminiscent of decorative motifs.



Figure 2.19: Wood door. H 168cm, w. 102 cm, Museum for *Islamische Kunst*, Berlin, (Ettinghausen et al., 2001b)

The medieval arts of Iraq, Syria, and Anatolia do not lend themselves to simple and easy generalizations. Because of its historical and ideological associations, the patronage of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad still had wide repercussions all over the Islamic world (Öz, 1984).

## 2.5.3. Western Islamic lands

The most important religious monument and its decoration of the area in medieval times are closely related to the creation of new cities, especially in the western part of North Africa more or less corresponding to modern Morocco and central or western Algeria, and to the growth of older cities in *al-Andalus*, Muslim Spain.

## 2.5.4. The art of the objects in Western Islamic lands

One of the most beautiful works attributable to the *Zirid* dynasty is the *maqsura* made for the Great Mosque of *Qayrawan* (Figure 2.20) Ordered by the *Zirid* ruler *al-Mu'izz ibn Badis* (r. 1016-62), who, according *to Ibn Khaldun*, enjoyed the richest and most flourishing reign ever seen in the *Maghrib*. This wooden protective enclosure is adorned with exquisitely carved and turned decoration. The former consists of a continuous band of bold, angular script on a vegetal ground bordered above by crenellations. Below this calligraphic band is another band decorated on several planes with a series of arabesque designs many of which betray their ultimate indebtedness to the beveled style first seen in Samarra and later in Egypt.

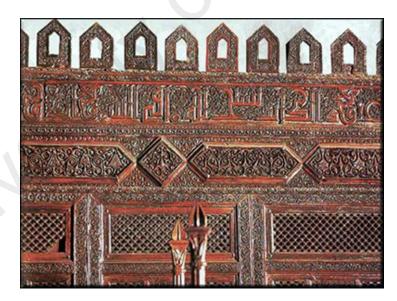


Figure 2.20: Detail of wood *Maqsura* in the Great Mosque, *Qyrawan*. Datable between 1016 and 1062, (*Blair et al., 1994*)

Most likely attributable to the patronage of the same ruler are the planks and beams composed of single pieces of wood surviving from the ceiling of this mosque (Figure 2. 21). Owing to the ravages of time and man, very few wooden ceilings of the hypostyle

mosques in the central and western Islamic lands from this period are extant. However, the types of ceilings current at a particular time, the ornament preferred, the coloration in vogue and the decorative techniques employed can be ascertained to a certain extent by means of the relatively small number of ceiling elements that have survived. Those extant from Qayrawan's congregational mosque provide answers not only concerning all of the questions vis-a-vis the Zirid period in *lfriqiya* but also indications as to the prototypes in the central Islamic lands. The vegetal design seen on this beam, polychrome painted on a red ground, betrays its pre-Islamic heritage in its hints of classical cornucopias and Sasanian scrolls. However, the bifurcations and number of secondary shoots place its prototype firmly in the early Islamic period. These eleventh-century beams from the ceiling of the Great Mosque should therefore be seen as reflective of earlier ceilings of which only a few elements seem to have survived, Since some of the contemporary ceiling beams from the Fatimid restoration in 1035 of the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem have come down to us, we further – and not surprisingly – state that the Zirid elements belong to the same tradition albeit seemingly less developed (Blair et al., 1994).



Figure 2.21: Detail of wood beams with painted decoration from the Great .Mosque, *Qyrawan*. Datable between 1016 and 1062 width ca. 15 cm. *Qyrawan*, Tunisia (*Blair et al.*, 1994)

It has been seen during the early Islamic period how the cycle of adoption, adaptation, and innovation in the art of the object in the central Islamic lands was echoed in the various contemporary artistic centers-in the western Islamic lands. Those works produced in the *Maghrib* during the subsequent medieval Islamic period are no exception to this pattern. The western version of classical early Islamic art that had developed in *al-Andalus* and North Africa prior to 1200 was further developed in the following two and a half centuries. In effect, and as regards *al-Andalus* in particular, not only was the influence of the peninsula's own special version of classical Islamic art evident in that created for the various party kings and their subjects but, in addition, there was the even greater influence of the versions created in Egypt and North Africa. These latter sources were particularly influential during the period under discussion here since trade as well as family connections kept the petty kings in close contact with the ruling houses on the southern coast of the Mediterranean.

The casket (Figure 2.22), made under the aegis of the *Taifa* kings of Toledo, illustrates very clearly the influence of the earlier *caliphal* artistic style; however, the designs have become flatter and more repetitive (Werckmeister, 1993).



Figure 2.22: casket. Dated 441/ 1049-50, 23 x 34 x 23.5cm. *musco Arqueologico* national, Madrid (Werckmeister, 1993)

The succeeding dynasties in North Africa *and al-Andalus*, namely the *Almoravids* and the *Almohads*, despite their rather puritanical beginnings soon became renowned for the brilliance of their courts, where some of the most original intellects of the day found a welcome and where the taste for luxury stimulated craftsmen to new peaks of achievement. Owing to a sequence of outstanding dated or datable objects, it is possible to follow in detail the evolution of carved as well as carved and inlaid wooden *minbars* made during the rule of these two Berber dynasties. The motifs of all these *minbars* were vegetal and geometric, and were more unified and subtle.

The *minbar* from the *Kutubiyya* Mosque in Marrakesh (Figure 2.23) is the next in the chronological and evolutionary sequence of these *Maghribi* pulpits; it is also the most illustrious and by far the finest of the extant group. According to one of its inscriptions, this masterpiece was begun in 1137 during the reign of the *Almoravid* ruler '*Ali ibn Yusuf* (r. 1106-43) and it was made in Cordoba for the congregational mosque in Marrakesh, the dynasty's capital. We know from contemporary texts that the latter pulpit was decorated with marquetry, making it the earliest object of its type known to have been so adorned. Such polychromic, composed of bone and various species of wood, is also found on that from the *Kutubiyya* Mosque, forming a myriad of designs and motifs. It is utilized for the strap work outlining the geometric pattern, on the stair risers and frames, and on the back-rest. In addition, wooden panels intricately carved with a delicate vegetal design are inlaid between the strap works outlining the infinite repeat pattern, engendered by a series of precisely located eight-pointed stars, on the triangular sides of the minbar. All the components of this staggeringly complex composition are beautifully balanced.



Figure 2.23: *Minbar* of bone and various species of wood from the Kutubiyya Mosque, Marrakesh, begun 532/1137, 3.86 x 3-46 x 0.90 m. Badi' Palace, Marrakesh, (*Bloom et al., 1998*)

There are two ways of understanding western Islamic art in the medieval period. One is to see it as one component, the westernmost one, of a large Islamic culture and, therefore, to compare it to whatever was happening in the other, larger, geographical segments of Islamic culture. The other one, perhaps favored by most recent scholarship, is to consider it as the expression of a very original *Maghribi*, primarily *Andalusian* and *Morocccan*, civilization, related, no doubt, to the wider Muslim world, but in fact much closer to a discrete western Mediterranean, Christian and Jewish as well as Muslim, cultural entity.

The fact that its *Andalusian* base was soon taken over by Christian-Spain and that Morocco remained physically somewhat removed from the rest of the Muslim world may reinforce this impression, since, as a result, documents of architecture and of other arts were not as readily preserved as elsewhere, and, in Morocco, they were not as frequently modified to fit

new tastes. In addition, in its own unique ways, the western Islamic world was also affected by the profound changes that characterized the rest of the Islamic world at this time. On a symbolic and perhaps even ideological level, the great series of western Islamic *minbars* may well be explained as an expression of the need to assert the presence of a militant faith in the achievements and patronage of rulers (Bloom et al., 1998).

#### 2.5.5. Eastern Islamic lands

The area involved from the Mesopotamian valley and the eastern Anatolian or Caucasian mountains to the *Tarim basin* in western China or the rich valleys of northern India, is vast and diverse in climate, range of architectural activities, and innovative trends. It will eventually be presented in terms of individual provinces, such as Fars or *Jibal* in western Iran, or the Bukhara oasis in the east.

## 2.5.5.1. Architectural decoration

The most significant technique of applied ornament in Eastern Islamic countries was stucco, the *gach* of Persian builders, but in *Khorezm* especially, the decoration was in wood, either inserted carved wooden panels or wooden columns and capitals covered with designs.

The overwhelming principle of decoration was geometric. Once the geometric network is established, the artisan uses other themes to fill in the spaces or to introduce more flexibility and suppleness. At times, the geometric line itself is broken so as to create a star at the center of the composition, but usually it is vegetal forms that impart movement and life. Themes of Abbasid origin were still used or revived, but the most common is an arabesque of stems and leaves (usually half-*palmettes*) of varying degrees of elegance. The arabesque always has a clearly defined axis of symmetry, but the best develop on several repeatedly

intersecting levels, thus creating movement in depth. Furthermore, the vegetal forms themselves, especially in the bands, may bear a network of geometric designs as decorative supports for inscriptions. Their stylistic evolution has not yet been charted, except in the case of a few of the *Ghaznavid* and *Ghorid* monuments.

Thus, the architectural decoration of the monuments of the eleventh and twelfth centuries could perhaps best be defined as a dialogue between the basic geometry and the lively movements of a vegetal arabesque. Thus, the artist produces several different levels of motif, from the first axis of symmetry to the last single dot of a punctured leaf. Consistent with principles already developed in early Islamic period, the composition consisted of an abstract relationship between lines, notches, and planes; the dynamism of motifs controlled by an unexpressed modular system gives visual force to the best designs. An equilibrium is created between the living models from nature and the abstraction of human geometry. The extent to which this contrast was intellectually realized at the time is still unknown, but it is probably not an accident that it was the age of the popularization in practical manuals of the high mathematics of the eleventh century.

The last decorative motif to be mentioned is writing. Ubiquitous, it appears in all techniques and in several styles relatable to the styles of script developed at the same time. Two aspects of writing are directly pertinent to architectural decoration. One is its use as a compositional device around ornamental panels. The other is its varied semantic function: In many mausoleums it identifies a patron, or indicates a date or it comprises a long *waqf* document about properties endowed for a pious purpose, and it provides the text of an epic poem. *Proclamatory*, indicative, or informative, writing has now become the most specific vehicle for the transmission of at least some of the meanings and uses of architecture (Ettinghausen et al., 2001d).

This is the architectural decoration in full movement that was be somewhat restrained by internal political dissensions in the late twelfth century, which affected the availability of patronage, and would then be halted by the Mongol conquest.

## 2.5.5.2. The art of objects

Because of the enormous wealth of decorative themes, a specific discussion of each and every one of them is impossible. Briefly, all types of design known earlier continued in use, and arabesques as well as other stylized vegetal forms, animals, and single or whole groups of human figures, as well as many space-filling motifs, were favored. Large, formal angular inscriptions and geometric configurations were on the other hand infrequent. Just one wooden sample belonging to that period remains, from the *minbar* of *Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad* (Figure 2.24).



Figure 2.24: Fragment of a pulpit, A.H. 546/A.D. 1151, Iran, Yazd, Wood (teak); carved and painted, H. 18 1/4 in (46.4 cm) W. 30 1/8 in (76.5 cm) (Ekhtiar et al., 2011)

This horizontal panel, probably once mounted above the *minbar* door, contains a foundation Kufic inscription providing the patron's name and date, which corresponds to the time of *Ala al-Dawla Garshasp*, ruler of Yazd under the *Seljuks*. Around the inscription

covered by arabesque motifs (Ekhtiar et al., 2011).

From about 1170 on, there was a progressive tendency towards combinations of many different motifs and complex compositions.

The specific styles of medieval eastern Islamic art are quite varied, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to find common strands that served different patrons and probably very different tastes. One such strand, obvious in the objects and in decoration in general, is what has been called 'geometric harmonization', that is to say, the presence of a sophisticated geometrically determined grid in the design of works of art. A second strand is the consistent presence of several levels of meaning for forms. The point is most obvious on objects that can be understood as simply decorated for the pleasure of users and viewers as well as carriers of complex iconographic messages or conducive to personal meditation. In addition, finally, the most important strand is that, however it is defined and explained, something visually original and idiosyncratic appeared in the arts of the eastern Islamic lands, something which will eventually form the basis of that *Iranicate* culture that survives to this day in many more places than the country of Iran proper. The cultural matrix that made this possible still eludes our understanding.

# 2.5.6. Iran and central Asia under the Il-Khanids and their successors

In the fall of 1253 the Great Khan Mongol, grandson of *Chingiz Khan* and supreme ruler of the Mongols in China, dispatched his brother *Hulagu* at the head of an army against the *Isma'ilis* in northern Iran and the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. *Hulagu* moved speedily across Iran, conquering and devastating whatever areas did not capitulate, and took Baghdad in 1258. This date marks the official establishment of the Mongol rulers in Persia known as Il-khans or subordinates to the great khan in China. *Hulagu* and his immediate

successors continued the nomadic practices of the steppe, wintering in the warmer lands of Mesopotamia and summering on the grassy plains of northwestern Iran. The *Il-Khanids* controlled the lands from the Oxus almost to the Mediterranean and from the Caucasus to the Indian Ocean, territory that is now western Afghanistan, Iran, southern Russia, eastern Turkey, and Iraq. Earthquakes, invasions, and subsequent occupations have destroyed all but the odd building from their capitals at *Maragha*, *Tabriz*, *Baghdad*, and *Sultaniyya*; and their urban infrastructure can hardly be gleaned from textual descriptions. Instead, it is provincial buildings in central and western Iran that have survived to provide an idea of the magnificence of architectural patronage under the *Il-Khanids*. (Blake, 1991).

# 2.5.6.1. The arts in Iran and central Asia under the *Il-Khanids* and their successors

The Mongol conquest in the mid-thirteenth century changed the balance of artistic production in Iran. In the preceding century the decorative arts – textiles, pottery, metalwork, jewelry, and manuscript illumination – were "perhaps at their most inventive and brilliant" (Brown, 1965). These "basic" crafts continued to be produced after the Mongol conquest, but the arts of the book took on a new role as the central focus of artistic production and the means by which new ideas and motifs were introduced to the other arts. The pivotal role of the arts of the book, particularly illustration, is one of the most important developments of Islamic art after 1250, as it characterizes the later history of the arts not only of Iran, but also of Turkey and India. Designs executed on paper were easily transferred from one medium to another, and professional designers (*naqqash*) signed works in such other media as wood, inlaid metal, carved stucco, and glazed tiles (Agrawala, 1967).

## 2.5.6.2. Wooden art in the *Il-Khanid* period

The *Il-Khanid* woodcarving dates back to the first decades of the 14th century, all the objects before the mentioned date are more imitated than innovative. Many samples in holy places show the importance of this artistic activity in the *Il-Khanid* period. At first glance, all the remaining objects have a few differences but they follow the same structure. In other words, all the objects after the 14<sup>th</sup> century have the Mughal characteristics. Even the *Gurkanid* wooden arts are affected by the Mughal wood work.

Wood continued to be used in the *Il-Khanid* period for architectural fittings as well as portable objects. *Minbars* in the congregational mosques of *Nayin* and Isfahan in central Iran are the most important pieces to survive from the early fourteenth century. They are both similar in form, but the one in Navin has a canopy. It was ordered in 1311 by a merchant and was signed by Mahmud Shah b. Muhammad, the designer. The triangular sides are composed of rectangular panels with shallow Beveled style arabesques within a mortised frame (Figure 2.24). The *minbar* from Isfahan has complex designs of octagonal tracery and carving (Figure 2.25). The carving on the geometric panels resembles that on the *minbar* from *Nayin*, but the decoration includes two new elements found in contemporary carvings: inscriptions in a stylized square script and naturalistic leaves in high relief (Figure 2.26). Many of these features can be found on other contemporary pieces of woodwork, such as the doors to the mosque in the shrine of *Bayazid* at *Bastam* (1307-9), a group of cenotaphs from the area around *Sultaniyya*, and a folding Koran stand made by Hasan Sulayman al-Isfahani for an unidentified madrasa in 1359. (Lenz & Lowry, 1989). They all show great technical ability and a rich decorative repertory.



Figure 2.25: *Minbar*, Great Mosque of Nain, *Ikhanid*, Iran, 14th century (Author)



Figure 2.26: Details of wooden Minbar, Great Mosque of Isfahan, Ikhanid, 14th century (Author)



Figure 2.27: Minbar, Wood, Ilkhanid period, Isfahan Great Mosque, 14th century (1304-1316) (Author)

This impressive Qur'an stand, or *rahla*, which is one the most accomplished works in wood to survive from Iran, bears the signature of its carver, who was probably from Isfahan in central Iran (Figure 2.28). The splendid carved decoration, which includes the motif of a flowered bush within a niche surrounded by calligraphic blessings upon the Prophet and the Twelve Imams, reveals a Shia association. Other inscriptions include the date as well as the name of the patron who ordered this stand for a madrasa (theological school), but they do not give the name of the school or the city where it was located.



Figure 2.28: Qur`an stand, Muzzafarid period (1314–93), dated A.H. 761 / A.D.1360, made by Hasan ibn Sulaiman al-Isfahani, Iran. 130,2 cm X 41 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art (Hasan ibn Sulaiman al-Isfahani: Stand for a Qur'an manuscript, 2000)

One of the enchanting samples belonging to the *Il-Khanid* era is the wooden box from the eastern Iranian world, which was built to house a thirty-volume manuscript of the Qur`an. The decoration is predominately epigraphic with a beautiful inscription in *Naskh* and *Thuluth* script, the latter against a ground of fine, spiraling vegetal scrolls and covering the side of the box, with Surah 3, verses 18-19 from the Qur`an. On the lid, a circular medallion charged with an arabesque is bordered with an inscription recording the name of the person who endowed the Qur`an manuscripts, and in whose name they were endowed: "the exalted, the honorable, foremost among the upright and the eminent, '*Izzad- Din Malik ibn Nasir-Allah Muhammad*, [may God] prolong his exaltedness, endowed this revered and complete copy of the blessed Qur`an for the benefit of the tomb of the deceased *Fakhr al-Din Chupan*". The inscription around the edge of the lid records that the deceased passed to eternal life shortly after the middle of the month of Rajab of the year AH 745, and features the signature of the marker," the poor slave [of God] *al-Hasan ibn Qutlun Beg ibn Fakhr al-Din*", indicating he was the deceased's grandson (Figure 2.29).



Figure 2.29: Curved wooden box, AH 745/ AD 1344, H. 26 cm, W. 43.5 cm, Collection Paris (Keene et al., 1983)

#### 2.5.6.3. Characteristics of wooden objects in the *Il-Khanid* period

As it is really difficult to identify and explain the characteristics of the art of Mughal era, it may help to define the paradox of the Mughal period. The Mughal art demonstrated a progression away from the dry and severe formalism of ninth-century vegetal decoration, to a much more lively arabesque with highly naturalistic features in the eleventh century, and, eventually, in the twelfth, to an elaborate geometry with its own formalism. Whether an evolution, which is apparent in woodwork, is true for all media remains to be seen.

The main three-compartment method in the *Il-Khanid* era was fabricated using the *Girih Chini* joinery technique, frame and panel, and outstanding frame. The outstanding frames are usually carved in square, rectangular, and chevron shapes. However, the frame and panel compartment method was more continuous than other methods and mostly used the carved square and rectangular wooden panels.

The carving was deep and slanted (6 to 15 mm) and the elements were in relief, and incised. Although sometimes the surface of the decoration was curved, mostly a flat surface

was used in carving.

Geometric pattern, scroll and calligraphy were the main pattern of woodcarving in this period. Calligraphy was mostly created by *Thulth*, *Naskh*, *Banaee* and *Kufic* that were designed by arabesque and *Kahatee* motifs as background. The most geometric motifs were used in the *Il-Khanid* period were the eight pointed star (*Girih Hasht Tond*) and six pointed star (*Shesh Irani*) and commonly decorated the door's frames and frame in frame and panel compartment. *Il-Khanid* artists used the motifs of interlacing heavy lines and varying complexity of the Arabesque and *Khataee* motifs. They started to use the *Torang* compartment that improved in the *Timurid* dynasty.

The arabesque motifs included *trilobed lancette* with elongated edge (*Chang dahan Ajdari*) and the *Khataee* motifs were mostly lotus blossom, *trilobed* and five lobed flower, cypress and *palmette*.

# 2.5.7. Timurid period: Tartar invasion and rule

Tamerlane's invasion of Persia and the establishment of the Timurid state by the tartars brought changes in Iran. Many cities and cultural monuments were ruined and visible changes occurred in the political, social, and cultural life of the Iranian people during the Timurid era. Along with the Mongol invasion, there was much destruction so that many aspects of Iranian culture were destroyed. However, as they themselves adapted to Iranian culture, the Mongols became *Persianized* (Bausani, 1971).

Since the Mughal motifs reflect the history and culture, the history of formation of motifs deserve consideration. This chapter is organized into three sections: historical background, identifying the motifs used in the wooden samples, and a summary of the Timurid motifs.

#### 2.5.7.1. Historical background

The fall of the *Il-Khanid* Mongol Empire gave rise in time to the Timurid dynasty in 1370. The founder of this new dynasty was known by several names; as Amir *Timur* in Central Asia, as Timur Lang or "*Lame*" after receiving injuries by the Turkmen in the desert of *Khwarazm*, and as Tamerlane in European languages (Browne, 1969a). In the spring of 1381, *Timur* started his first campaign against Persia and launched his second campaign during 1384-1385, and a third and last invasion occurred in 1392. The last invasion ended the *Il-Khanid* and some of the minor dynasties, which had broken away from the Mongol. The Timurid invasion was a destructive one. Many centres of cultural activities were destroyed (Browne, 1969c).

For the last remaining twenty years of his life following his third campaign, *Timur*, almost annually, arranged a campaign against different parts of Persia, India, Syria, and China. In addition, *Timur* made contact with other foreign countries, exchanging embassies with Spain among others, and, in return, these countries set up embassies in Persia. *Timur* was engaged in establishing his domain and securing his territories during his lifetime. *Timur`s* son *Shahrukh*, became the ruler of the Timurid empire. *Malcom* noted that *Shahrukh`s* intention was not to extend his empire but to repair the ravages committed by his father (Malcom, 1815).

After the death of *Shahrukh*, the house of *Timur* was driven out of Iran. However, *Timur`s* descendants played a distinguished role in Indian history for the Great Mogul dynasty of India was founded by Babur, the great- great- great grandson of *Timur*.

After *Shahrukh's* death in 1447, his son *Ulughbeg* took over the realm, but within two years he was murdered by his own son. His nephew Abu Sa 'id (r. 146 1 - 69) managed to

overcome depredations by rivals on the east and west and reunited *Transoxiana*. The most remarkable patron of the age, however, was *Husayn Bayqara* (r. 1470-1506) who ruled *Khurasan* from Herat, where the final flowering of *Timurid* culture took place. Stars in his constellation included the poet '*Abd al-Rahman Jami* (1414-92), the painter *Bihzad*, and the polymath '*Alishir Nava'i* (1440-1501), himself another famous patron (Browne, 1969b).

## 2.5.7.2. The visual arts of the Timurid period

As with architecture, the decorative arts created under the Timurids and their contemporaries set the standards of excellence for generations in Iran, as well as India and Turkey. Not only were Timurid models emulated, compositions repeated, and techniques followed, works of art that had belonged to *Timur's* followers were avidly collected by discerning connoisseurs.

The capital cities of the Timurid dynasty in Central Asia and Afghanistan – *Shahr-i Sabz*, Samarqand, Bukhara, and Herat – were centres of art and culture intended to display the greatness of Timurid power. The finest craftsmen of the day were recruited, often forcibly, from east and west to realize Timurid aspirations. Much of this splendour has not survived, as earthquakes, invasions, and neglect have all taken their toll. The architecture of this period falls neatly into four phases: building under *Timur* (r. 13 70- 1405); that of his son *Shahrukh* (r. 140 5 -4 7) and his wife, *Gawharshad*; that of the sultan, *Husayn Bayqara* (r. 1470-1506) and his confidant, the bureaucrat, *'Alishir Nava'i*; and that of the *Timurids' Turkoman* rivals in western Iran, the *Qaraqoyunlu* (Black Sheep; 1380-1468) and the *Aqqoyunlu* (White Sheep; 1378-1508).

The court life of the second half of the fifteenth century was more splendid than that of the first, especially under Sultan *Hossein Mirza* (Golombek & Wilber, 1988).

The legacy of the decorative arts in Iran and Central Asia during the fifteenth century passed not only through the splendid objects made for Timurid patrons but also through artists and artisans who carried the Timurid style elsewhere. The Timurid visual vocabulary, which had been developed in Iran and Central Asia in the fifteenth century, came to permeate the visual arts of other regions, notably Turkey and Muslim India, and there developed what has come to be called an International Timurid style. This style, characterized by *chinoiserie* floral motifs integrated into languid arabesques, became particularly important in the development of a distinct Ottoman style in the sixteenth century (McAlister, 1943).

# 2.5.7.3. Wooden art

Although *Timur*'s armies destroyed many art works, his successors established a climate that encouraged and supported works of art by supporting the artists so that artistic expression reached its most flourishing stage (Martin, 1812).

Limited information is available with regards to the wooden objects of the Timurid era. However, attempts have been made by scholars to identify the types of wood and the designs commonly used during this period of time. Some information is provided by Dr. *Kian Mehr*, a scholar who studied wooden arts and objects of the thirteenth until the sixteenth century.

Following *Timur*'s campaigns in Western Iran, Iraq and Syria, he forcibly moved craftsmen to Central Asia to work on his new buildings. Multi-level floral and arabesque carving continued throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century and transferred to other media, such as stone.

In 15<sup>th</sup> century Iran, woodwork continued to be produced at more modest level of patronage, and many contemporary innovations from Central Asia went unnoticed. Two

pairs of doors (1427-8) survive at the mosque at *Afushta* near *Natanz* in central Iran. Each valve has the traditional tripartite division, but the carving is less lively and broad flat borders contrast sharply with the carved arabesque ground (Figure 2.30). The richly forested, but more remote province of *Mazandaran* was a major woodworking centre, and many of its mosques and shrines were fitted with carved wooden doors, shutters and cenotaphs (kiyan mehr et al., 2004).



Figure 2.30: Detail of Afushte wooden door leaves, Timurid period (Author)

## 2.6. India in Islamic era

Muslim conquerors reached the Indian subcontinent as early as the first decade of the eighth century, and the province of Simi, at the mouth of the Indus river, has remained Muslim ever since. Between 1001 and 1026, the *Ghaznavid* Mahmud led several expeditions to establish Muslim rule in northern India. The major centers of the *Ghaznavids*, however, and of the *Ghorids* who followed them, were in Afghanistan, and India was mostly a source of booty and wealth to enrich their constructions and collections

there, as is amply demonstrated by the objects excavated at *Ghazni*. The turning point from exploitation and conquest to settlement and local development arrived in 1193, when the *Ghorid* Sultan Muhammad, the builder of Jam in Afghanistan, conquered Delhi and made it the center of Muslim India; here and in a few other cities his governors and successors, the so-called slave-kings, sponsored the first monumental architecture of the new province.

The most remarkable ensemble of this time is the so-called *Qutb-Minar* ensemble in Delhi, erected for the most part in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries on the platform of an older Indian temple. A number of other mosques of that time, in Delhi, *Bhadreswar*, *Bayana*, and especially in Ajmer, exemplify the same characteristics and utilized Hindu materials for construction.

As Muslim culture established itself in new areas, it took over local traditions and modified them according to its own formal and liturgical habits and practices. Obviously, some features of Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain art were totally unsuitable for Islamic purposes, and were from the very beginning rejected out of hand, while others could be adopted without a second thought. However, in yet other cases, a period of experiment seems to have been required before the element in question was accepted or rejected. Thus, progress came in fits and starts. The political fragmentation of the subcontinent in the Sultanate period (1191-1526) could only accentuate the spasmodic nature of this development (Blair & Bloom, 1995; Hillenbrand, 1988).

As Muslim culture appeared in India, these habits and practices originated from eastern Iran, but the techniques of construction and largely of decoration were local. There is a sample that completely followed the Iranian style for decorating. Arabesque with vine scrolls, *palmette* and *lancette*, are the main motifs used in the remaining example. The most noticeable feature of this panel is the incorporation of flora, fauna and calligraphy in one single object (Figure 2.31).



Figure 2.31: Fragment of a marble panel, North of India, *Ghaznavid* period; c. 1100, H: 46; W: 85; D: 8 cm(*Rugiadi*, 2007)

India gave up some of its traditional forms, such as figural sculpture, in order to become Islamic; the Muslim conquerors of the twelfth century, however, were strongly affected by Indian modes of construction and created an art which, within the Islamic fold, always remained original (Figure 2.32) (Rugiadi, 2007).



Figure 2.32: Fragment of a marble panel, North of India, *Ghaznavid* period; c. 1100, H: 46; W: 85; D: 8 cm (Rugiadi, 2007)

Structural ideas and use of materials, as well as the functional and esthetic use play a role in

determining what is expressed by it. Development of the understanding of the functional and esthetic use of materials and technique in an effective manner are dependent on assimilated technologies. An integrated process of standard materials, skilled labor, innovative ideas and socio-economics as well as geographical factors may be necessary to construct any magnificent artwork.

Although the impact of Islam in India was overwhelming, this does not negatively influence the Indian artistic skill concerning the formation of a truly distinctive style of Islamic art in India (Asher, 1984). The Muslims brought with them their own artistic skill and traditions. They, however, found a completely different environment in India, to which their traditions of artwork had to be accommodated (Hasan, 2007).

# 2.6.1. Art in India under the Mughals

The Mughals (r. 1526-1858) were the greatest, richest, and longest-lasting Muslim dynasty to rule a large geographic area divided today into Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Northern India. *Babur* (r. 1526-30), the founder of the dynasty, was a *Chaghatay* Turk descended on his father's side from *Timur* and on his mother's from *Chingiz Khan. Babur's* father, *Umar Shaykh*, had ruled a small *Timurid* principality in the Fergana Valley in Central Asia, but the rising power of the Uzbek Turks forced Babur to the east. Mughal, the name of the dynasty, is a variant of Mongol and was used in India to distinguish immigrants or the recently immigrated from local Muslims. It was applied to Persian, Turks, and Arabs as well as to descendants of *Chingiz Khan*.

In 1526, Babur, at that time ruler of city state cantered on Kabul, was invited to the Punjab by a group of Afghan nobles dissatisfied with the rule of their chief, *Ibrahim Lodi*. Meeting Ibrahim at *Panipat*, *Babur* decisively defeated the Afghans and inaugurated Mughal rule in the subcontinent.

Following his victory, Babur and his men moved quickly down the Ganges, capturing Delhi, Agra, *Gwalior*, *Kannauj*, and *Jaunpur* in the space of few months. In 1527, he defeated the massed armies of the *Rajout* ruler, *Rana Sanga*, and by 1529 was master of the Indo-*gangetic* Plains all the way to *Patna*. In 1530, at the height of his power, he died.

With these victories, the Mughal line gained a foothold in northern India, but Babur's son *Humayun* (r. 1530-56, with interruption) was dislodged by insurrections of the nobles from the old Lodi regime, particularly *Farid* Khan Sur. Operating from *Bihar*, the Afghan chief defeated *Humayun* at *Kannauj* in 1540 and drove the Mughal ruler from India until 1555. The Mughal domains passed to the control of *Farid* Khan, who assumed the *regnal* name *Shir* Shah Sur (r. 1540-55). He was not only a fine general, but also an able ruler, introducing important fiscal and monetary reforms, which were incorporated into the Mughal system of administration. During *Shir Shah's* interregnum, *Humayun* spent fifteen years in exile in Sind, Iran, and Afghanistan, but the squabbling for succession among *Shir Shah's* successors enabled the Mughal to regain the throne in 1555. *Humayun* died unexpectedly a year later after falling down the stairs of his library in Delhi and was succeeded by his son Akbar (r. 1556-1605).

During Akbar's long reign, the dynasty extended its power over northern and central India. During his reign, which lasted nearly fifty years (1556–1605), Akbar established dominion over northern and central India, as far east as Bengal. He secured the north western frontier, gateway to India for so many previous invasions, through his control of Kabul. *Akbar's* most important territorial gain was the sultanate of Gujarat, in the west, which provided the Mughal Empire with enormous wealth from its commercial centres. Akbar was also the first great Mughal patron of the arts. Of his various building projects, the most ambitious was the new capital city of *Fatehpur sikri*, near Agra. Built mostly between 1571 and 1585, when Akbar adopted Lahore as his principal residence, the palace buildings at *Fatehpur sikri* reflect a synthesis of *Timurid* traditions of Iran and Central Asia with indigenous traditions of Hindu and Muslim India. Although he is said to have been illiterate, Akbar assembled a royal atelier, first at *Fatehpur sikri*, then at Lahore, from which he commissioned numerous illustrated manuscripts that incorporate Persian, Indian, and even European elements. In fact, the artists who worked for *Akbar*, the first great Mughal patron of the arts of the book, included Persians as well as Indian Muslims and Hindus. This collaborative process helped to foster the development of a specifically Mughal style, which was initiated under Akbar and is demonstrated by pages from diverse late-sixteenth-century manuscripts. This style of painting was further developed and refined during the reigns of *Jahangir* and *Shah Jahan* during the seventeenth century (Marika, 2000).

Under *Akbar*'s successor, *Jahangir* (r. 1605-27), the policy of subjugating outlying areas of the Indian subcontinent continued. *Shah Jahan* (r. 1628-58) undertook an ambitious program of uniting Central Asia and India in a grand empire of Sunni Islam (to counter the Shiite *Safavids*), but this ended in failure in 1647, and a conservative reaction ensued under *Awrangzib* (r. 1658-1707). Notables and provincial officials, both Muslim and non-Muslim, became increasingly powerful, and, by the eighteenth century, the Mughal emperors in Delhi were only shadows of their former selves, as power devolved to provincial rulers and Europeans, particularly the British. More monuments survive from the period of Mughal rule than from any other, for the Mughal state was well aware of the declamatory power of

architecture and used it as a means of self-representation and an instrument of royalty (Asher, 1992).

In the later part of the period, royal patronage of architecture and the arts was curtailed, but the great monuments of the past continued to provide inspiration for patrons with shallower pockets. Under Mughal patronage there developed a distinctive and elegant style of architecture, in which indigenous traditions of Indo-Islamic architecture were combined with forms and techniques imported from Iran and Central Asia. A similar composite style drawing on local and Iranian traditions developed in the *Deccan*.

In general, the solid three-dimensional massing typical of earlier sultanate buildings gave way to a linear approach, in which flat surfaces were divided into panels. The brick and tile typical of earlier times were replaced by stone, particularly red sandstone and white marble, but the application of colour was restrained in favour of a highly polished and meticulous finish. The new forms as the ogee arch and the bulbous dome became standard features of the Mughal style. Large congregational mosques were built by rulers who wished to emphasize their Muslim piety, but the most famous buildings associated with the Mughals are monumental tombs set on platforms amidst pools and formal gardens and magnificent forts and fortified palaces constructed throughout the empire, particularly in the capitals at Delhi, *Fatehpur sikri*, Lahore, and Agra (Blair & Bloom, 1994).

# 2.6.1.1. Islamic dynasty in Deccan

In the fourteenth century in the Deccan in central India, a well-known Sultanate dynasty was established whose sultans called themselves *Bahmani*. They claimed to be descended from the *Sasanians*, and, in their buildings, they decorated the crowns of the arches with a device, which varied in detail, but, as its main components, had two open wings

surmounted by a crescent and sometimes a disk that closely resembled the emblems on the crowns of the *Sasanian* emperors. The founder of the dynasty was *Zafar* Khan *Hasan Gangu*, a Persian adventurer at the Delhi court. Muhammad b. *Tughluq* made him governor of Gulbarga. The early example of Sassanid motifs (winged motifs) is therefore to be found on the arches of the buildings of Gulbarga. As with the *Bahmani* motifs, the *Sasanian* emblems appear in great variety. It is usually considered that in the *Achaemenid* period the cults of *Mithra* and *Anahita*, which were probably always strong in Iranian society, influenced the royal monotheistic religion. It seems that the sphere in reliefs represents *Mithra* and the crescent *Anahita*.

The changes of the emblems on *Sasanian* may not be without significance, and may be closely associated with the social and religious conditions of the time. The adoption of the star and the crescent as a symbol by the western Islamic world is well known, however, in the *Bahmani* emblems, the star is never represented instead of the disk (Ferguson, 1959).

## 2.6.1.2. Wooden work during Mughal Empire

Like other Islamic dynasties, the Mughals made use of different types of wooden furniture for religious and secular purposes; however, these were very seldom described. According to Brand and Lowry, during Akbar's reign "works of wood ... were produced in the imperial ateliers." (Brand & Lowry, 1985). One can assume, for obvious reasons, the correctness of this statement. It is well known that a great number of workshops, or *karkhanas*, were created and maintained by Akbar (Abu'l, 1873). The emperor Akbar had a velvet throne of the Portuguese type carried with him on a journey, [which he] very frequently uses, as noted by *Monserrate* in about 1580. (Monserrate, 1992). Akbar also "had a rich cabinet to be made, in which to keep the volumes of the Royal Bible, in four languages (Du Jarric, 2005). His heir, Jahangir, also invested vast resources in the royal ateliers, which were capable of copying works in different media, including wood (Roe, 1899). According to Edward Terry, chaplain of Sir Thomas Roe, the coach given by the English East Indies Company to Jahangir-described by the emperor as a "Frankish carriage, which had four horses attached to it (Jahangir, 1909). The love of realism, a characteristic of the Mughal scriptorium, meant that the most diverse objects, whether common or precious, were depicted as naturalistically as possible.

One of the most interesting consequences of the conquest of art works in 1573 by Akbar was the encounter of two cultures, European and Mughal. This episode began a lengthy cross-cultural relationship that first included the Portuguese, and, later on, various Western powers.

One of the intrinsically European types is the cabinet, widely used in Europe during the High Renaissance to store precious documents, objects, or money. By the seventeenth century, cabinets had become standard items of furniture in well-to-do houses. This fashion was also observed in the Estado da India, the Portuguese State of India, and a conspicu-ously large number of these cabinets have survived.

Despite the apparent lack of specific documentary sources and material evidence, one of the most splendid early Mughal buildings provides the best proof of the superior technical skills of Akbar's woodworkers and decorators. The remarkable canopy in the interior of the white marble tomb of *Shaykh Salim al-Din Chishti* (d. 1571-72), located in the courtyard of the Jami' Masjid at *Fatehpur sikri* and thought to have been finished in the early years of Jahangir's reign, ca. 1606, has survived to this day in remarkable condition. Its columns and canopy are decorated with mother-of pearl and ebony marquetry (Figure 2.33), but its

structure is of wood. This particular decorative technique has its origins in Gujarat (Digby, 1986).



Figure 2.33: Canopy, mother-of-pearl and ebony marquetry. Interior of the tomb of *Shaykh Salim al-Din Chishti*, *Fatehpur Sikri*, ca. 1606 (Digby, 1986)

The sharing of imagery was a popular practice in Mughal India, with the same decorative motifs often inspiring the embellishment of manuscripts, textiles, wooden work and other types of art. The examination of specific pieces allows us to conclude that the furniture industry was also influenced by courtly fashions. Indeed, certain pieces invite extensive comparisons with royal works of art, thus indicating a connection between courtly models and specific production centres.

There is a group consisting mostly of cabinets and caskets of various forms, the decoration of which includes traditional themes of the Mughal repertoire, including mythical beasts, such as the *simurgh* and human figures dressed after the Mughal and Portuguese fashions. The latter are mostly depicted hunting, engaged in conversation, dancing, or playing musical instruments. Colour is frequently used; different woods as well as ivory inlays are often stained with red or green pigment (Porter, 1995).

One of these types of masterpiece is an inlaid casket from Gujarat. Of rectangular form with hinged drop front; the top and four sides all decorated with marquetry panels, each with a composition cantered around three trees surrounded by near-symmetrical arrangements of lions, humans and birds; each side with a border of leafy, floral vine; the reverse of the front similar; the six drawers with floral sprays surrounded by confronted birds; later applied keyhole panel; and some repairs (Figure 2.34).



Figure 2.34: An Indo- Portuguese Ivory- Inlaid casket, Gujarat or Sindh, 17th Century, 10 7/8 x 16 x 12 1/8in (27.8 x 40.8 x 30.5cm.) (Jaffer, 2002b)

The absence of inscriptions on Mughal art objects makes it more difficult to assign them specifically to either an artist or a production centre.

The decoration of an extremely small group of cabinets, including one (Figure 2.35), epitomizes what must be considered the highest achievements of the Indian inlay workers. Magnificent rosewood in front cabinet inlaid in ivory with an elegant pattern of Mughal flowers and cloud bands. The ivory has been finely engraved and stained with lac. Each side is decorated with formal rows of floral sprays with delicate cloud bands that float

between, surrounded by a frame of scrolling floral arabesques with a thin border of *sadeli* (micro-mosaic) between. To the front of the box is a keyhole with an ivory escutcheon. The interior opens to reveal twenty-three small drawers with red-stained ivory drawer pulls surrounding a larger central drawer. The inner surface of the fall-front is also beautifully inlaid with flowering plants while the back of the box has an oval cartouche with three miniature tree of life designs, each standing on stylized rocks.



Figure 2.35: Rosewood and ivory inlaid Cabinet, Western India (Gujarat), H. 47 cm, W. 65.5 cm, D. 44 cm. Mughal Era (Jaffer, 2002b)

The stylized flowers and leaves include poppies, lilies, irises and composite flowers, formally arranged in rows but full of movement with flower-heads that turn in different directions accompanied by twisting leaves and cloud bands that also float in different directions.

According to *Jaffer*, the ornament on ivory-inlaid furniture made in western Indian in the mid to late seventeenth century reflects more closely the Mughal court style in contrast to earlier cabinets from this region (Jaffer, 2002b). This shift in design is matched by an improvement in the quality of the inlay itself. The round-headed trees and dense foliage of

earlier work are replaced by full-blown flowering plants that began to permeate Mughal painting, architecture, textiles, dress and metalwork from the second quarter of the seventeenth century onwards. As Daniel Walker observes, 'the flower style' commonly identified with the Mughal emperor *Shah Jahan* did not emerge suddenly or spontaneously, but followed in the train of a long-standing Mughal appreciation for flowers that since Akbar's day was manifested in courtly painting and the decorative arts (Walker, 1997). The new 'flower style' featured naturalistic flowering plants depicted in profile against a plain background or formally arranged in rows. It is the heightened naturalism of the flowers and leaves, in combination with their contrasting formality of presentation that distinguishes the 'flower style' from earlier styles in Indian art and decoration. It represents a purely Mughal aesthetic quite different from anything seen in earlier Indian art and may be regarded as the epitome of Mughal decoration.

Although the 'flower style' reached its perfect and most characteristic expression during *Shah Jahan's* reign (1627-1658), it was not originated by *Shah Jahan's* court artists. Floral blossoms and whole plants were commonly represented during the reigns of Akbar and Jahangir but the representations were not especially naturalistic, nor were they formally arranged. Plants were treated as secondary decorative elements and were not the primary focus or subject of the decoration (Walker, 1997). It is important to note that two of the most significant artistic projects of Jahangir's reign, the great album compiled between 1599 and 1618 and the tomb of *Itimad ud-daula*, completed in 1628, are classic examples of the Persian style in India. Walker argues that the absence of formally arranged flowering plants on these two Imperial productions signifies that the 'flower style' had not yet become part of the standard decorative vocabulary.

However, the origin of the style can in fact be linked to the later reign of Jahangir. A key event in its development, as demonstrated by Robert Skelton, was the famous visit of *Jahangir* to Kashmir during the spring of 1620, when the emperor commissioned the court artist *Mansur* to depict flowers of the region. In *Mansur's* sharply observed and botanically accurate 'flower portraits' lie the genesis of the 'flower style' (Skelton, 1972). They combine a heightened indigenous naturalism with the formal pose, relatively plain background and hovering butterfly or other insect characteristic of the European herbalist style. Scholars are divided over the degree of influence that European albums of flowers exercised over Mansur's works but his treatment of floral subjects was probably directed to some extent by herbal drawings and prints collected by the Mughal court. Copies of European engravings have appeared in Mughal albums of miniatures.

This cabinet represents therefore the brilliant fusion of Mughal decorative motifs, Indian materials and techniques, and a European furniture form. The fall-front cabinet is a sixteenth century European form much reproduced in Asia under European patronage (Jaffer, 2002c). According to *Jaffer*, the development of schools of Western-style furniture making seems to have taken place first in the textile-producing region of *Gujarat*. It is apparent from contemporary accounts, as well as the objects themselves, that in the sixteenth century, Gujarati artisans had access to Western prototypes as well as Westernstyle objects made in other parts of Asia. The craftsmen's familiarity with furniture imported from Europe was supplemented with a more practical understanding of the furniture-making trade acquired from the growing number of European tradesmen, among them cabinet-makers, who arrived in India from Europe, hoping to make a fortune from the rapidly growing settlements at Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. At ports, such as *Surat*, the convergence of diverse goods and patrons who brought with them their own decorative

traditions, created an atmosphere highly conducive to artistic and technical exchange (Jaffer, 2002a).

The Islamic architecture of Gujarat is probably one of the most famous regional traditions of Muslim architecture in South Asia. Numerous mosques, mausoleum, step-wells, and even palaces have survived throughout Gujarat State, and no Gujarati city has a greater concentration of Islamic architecture than Ahmedabad, the capital of the region under the Ahmad Shah Sultans, and, later, the Mughals. The vast majority of these surviving structures are built in stone, with profuse external decoration and finely carved *mihrabs*, *jalis*, and inscriptions. There is also considerable literary evidence for the existence of pure wooden construction in certain parts of Gujarat.

Both Jain and Muslim sources record that the early eleventh century temple at *Somnath patan* was built of timber. *Gujarat* is extremely rich in surviving Islamic structures and much effort has been and is necessarily being devoted to documenting individual sites and buildings. The Islamic architecture and stone carving of Gujarat has mainly been approached from a rigidly land based perspective when in fact, Gujarat's geography – at the interface between northern India and the Indian Ocean – opened it up to influences and movements of population from both areas (Lambourn, 2003).

The use of timber in Gujarat is not without its paradoxes, however, since timber, like stone, was not always a naturally occurring building material. Pramar has argued that Gujarat did not have large viable forests for the provision of structural timber, such as sal (*Shorea robusta*) or teak (*Tectona grandis*), the two Indian trees that yield the best structural timber. Although several areas, such as the *Gir* forest in *Saurashtra*, the *Dangs* in southern Gujarat and the hilly eastern fringes of the state, are potential sources of timber, *Pramar's* research

has established that these areas yielded wood poor in either quality or quantity, insufficient for a regular and reliable production (Pramar, 1989). Perhaps, more surprisingly, a few structures have survived. A late though not particularly fine example is the nineteenthcentury wooden extension to the fourteenth century Tanka Mosque at *Dholka*. The amount of covered prayer space was increased by building across the courtyard; in this area, construction is entirely in wood, with stone used only for the pillar bases and paving (Figure 2.36). The roof here is flat with plain, undecorated ceilings (Burgess, 1896).



Figure 2.36: Interior of the Tanka Mosque, Dholka, showing the nineteenth century wooden extension to the fourteenth century mosque (Nazim, 1933-34)

There is a mosque with a record, in Persian verse (Figure 2.37), the construction of a mosque by one *Murtazz Khan Muzzafar Ghazi* in 1018 (1609). The inscriptions are no longer in situ on the beams, and it is clear that the mosque has undergone substantial alterations, notably including a reroofing, since the 1930s. However, substantial parts of the original structure do survive.



Figure 2.37: Foundation inscriptions from the wooden beams of the Qazi Mosque, Bharuch (Nazim, 1933-34)

Here, a pattern of survival opposite that of the *Masjid-i Fath* appears to have operated, with the original exterior walls being lost but fine wooden pillars (Figure 2.38), numerous stone bases, and a superb pair of carved wooden doors surviving (Figure 2.39) (Nazim, 1933-34).



Figure 2.38: Wooden pillar from the *Qazi Mosque at Bharuch*, probably early seventeenth century (Lambourn, 2006)



Figure 2.39: Wooden doors at the Qazi Mosque, Bharuch, possibly early seventeenth century or earlier (Elizabeth Lambourn) (Lambourn, 2006)

#### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1.** Introduction

In this chapter, the qualitative research focuses on analysing and explaining the shape and concept of the motifs of Iranian and Indian wooden objects belonging to the Mughal era. The research methodology and materials used in formation of this research will be described, and the researcher presents an overall view of the values that are going to be used in order to reach the desirable result. The research process will also illustrate, while the choice of theoretical framework will justify. The map of the literature review and the way of data collection will be presented, and, consequently, the data analysis will be explained.

## 3.2. Description of applied method

Research design is a significant and logical part of any research. The research design is used to structure the research, to show how all of the major parts of the research project address the central research questions. According to Yin (2003), the research design provides the connective links among the data collected or "a logical plan for getting from here to there" (Yin, 2003a). The research design can also be indicated as a specific procedure involved in the latest three steps of the process, such as data collection, data analysis and report writing.

In this study, the researcher chose an approach concerning a particular connection between Indian and Persian wooden artefacts in the Mughal era, and its appropriateness is derived from the close relationship of the mentioned countries in, as well as before that specific era. Therefore, this study is supported by the primary sources of case studies, so the qualitative method is appropriate to identify, and report the data. The researcher will also identify sources to justify and interpret the roots of the similarities between the objects of both countries and the concept of symbolic motifs used in artefacts with the secondary sources. Some parts of this research focus on explaining the historical, cultural, and artistic factors for the affective factors in creating symbolic motifs in Iran and India during the Mughal period.

A case study is a strategy of research that includes all methods "covering the logic of design, data collection techniques and specific approaches to data analysis" (Yin, 2003b). Case study helps to explain both the outcome and the process of a phenomenon via complete reconstruction and observation of cases under holistic investigation (Tellis, 1997). It is found in several fields of research that focus on the gap connected to complicated phenomena. The method of case study performs as a pattern to organize and interpret data for this qualitative research to have an in depth exploration and holistic understanding of issues when it is required. In order to do a case study one must know the definition of the case, the data that are relevant and their collection, as well as the process of doing tasks on the collected data. It can include a single study or multiple case studies. Case study research is a method that concentrates on describing, explaining, understanding, and predicting the individual (Yin, 2003a).

According to Yin (2003), there are six sources from which to collect the evidence for a case study: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artefacts. However, in fact, various sources are highly complementary, and a good case study will therefore want to use as many sources as possible. Therefore, in

dealing with this research, documents and direct observation will be used to obtain the best data collection. This research focused on observation.

# **3.3.** The research samples

The samples discussed in this research are the motifs of Iranian and Indian wooden objects in the Mughal era. To achieve the purpose of this study, much research has been done to identify samples that, hitherto, have been disregarded to show a better understanding of wooden object motifs in the Mughal dynasty in the aforementioned countries.

It may be a surprise to find that the favorite examples of particular types are missing from this research. Apart from the sheer impossibility of including every beautiful and wellknown object from the period, preference has been given to works where even more beautiful examples of the same type exist.

In addition, as most of the art works have been made during Mughal period are the encounter of two cultures, European and Mughal. This episode began a lengthy crosscultural relationship that first included the Portuguese, and, later on, various Western powers. One of the intrinsically European types is the cabinet, widely used in Europe during the High Renaissance to store precious documents, objects, or money. By the seventeenth century, cabinets had become standard items of furniture in well-to-do houses. This fashion was also observed in the Estado da India, the Portuguese State of India, and a conspicuously large number of these cabinets have survived. That is why large numbers of wooden objects were made in that period could not been used for this thesis.

For investigation and acquiring the information, different cities and regions in Iran and India were visited and about 2000 photos were taken of the objects and motifs. In the next step, one wooden door was identified and examined for the preliminary study; the door belongs to the *Ghasem Mausoleum* of *Sari*. The identified wooden door was studied to determine whether, in general, the wooden sample was a usable source of information in motifs of the Mughal era and whether the details were visible to differentiate the motifs.

Since inclusion of all the wooden samples in the body of this dissertation was not practical, after a careful examination of the motifs, it was decided to include only a limited number of them. The decision on the selection was based on the overall clarity, and representation of the most typical motifs for the time period under investigation.

Finally, the samples chosen for analysis from several monuments were five wooden doors and cenotaphs from Iran (Figure 3.1) and six wooden objects from India (Figure 3.2). Thus, according to this aim, the researcher selected maximal variation sampling for explicating and accomplishing the research purpose. These selected samples show the most common motifs rather than other samples. The researcher also searched about the motifs of the Mughal era in libraries to find disregarded subject matter concerning Mughal art of objects and motifs to show a better understanding of Mughal art.

The wooden samples used for the study are described as follows:

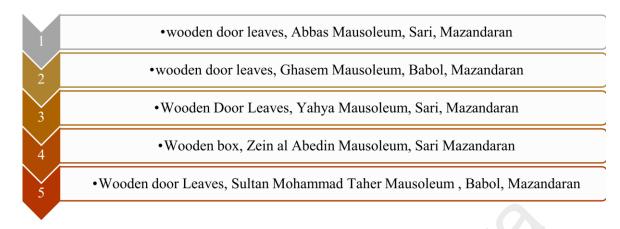


Figure 3.1: The name of the wooden samples are selected for analysis from Iran

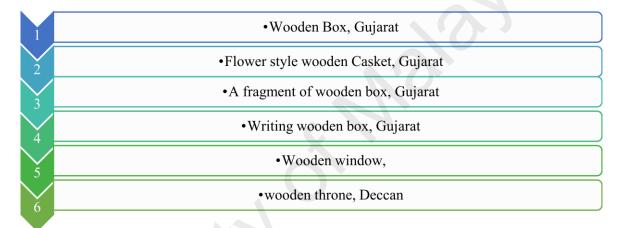


Figure 3.2: The name of the wooden samples selected from India for analysis

# 3.4. Research process

Defining the problem is the first step that a researcher undertakes. In order to find a suitable research topic, the scholarly literature regarding Islamic art in Iran and India, wooden art, and symbolic motifs of the Mughal era was reviewed. The researcher spent a considerable time in libraries in order to identify sources and understand how scholars think about this subject and what problems they encountered. Then, the researcher tried to find the most important issue about the Mughal wooden art. The most important thing was that there are

only a few studies about the analysis of wooden objects, which are the only objects that no attention has been paid to by scholars.

Then the researcher defined eleven wooden objects of famous monuments belonging to the Mughal era in Iran and India to the motifs. The researcher expanded the objective of the study followed by the questions about analysing the motifs, and investigated the factors that were affective in Iran and the similarities and differences with the Indian motifs. Then, a literature review was conducted to show Iranian and Indian motifs from the beginning of Islam to the end of the Mughal period. In reviewing these sources, the emphasis was on revealing the gist of the matter, the results of these studies and their gaps. After examining many of the wooden samples, it was evident that the motifs depicted in wooden objects were very similar in detail. Therefore, one card was prepared for each motif in a sample. A record was made of each motif observed in the wooden objects to obtain the frequency of distribution and to determine the most representative motifs. A master card was prepared to record the summary for all the motifs in each sample. The summary included descriptive information about the motifs for each sample, to relate the finding to the reviewed literature, and to provide information concerning the concept of motifs throughout the Islamic era and Mughal dynasty. Then, the theoretical framework is discussed and I showed the divisions of the motifs for the chosen art works, and used the Visual semiotic and Iconology and Iconographic theories.

## **3.5.** Research instrument

In this research, the researcher d five important wooden objects from Iran and six wooden works from India belonging to the Mughal era. Of all the wooden objects selected, only a limited number of wooden works remained from the Mughal dynasty. For analysing the art works, the researcher made use of the Visual semiotic and Iconology and Iconographic theories.

To identify the factors and problems pertaining to Mughal art in Iran and India, history books collected from the library about the Mughal dynasty were used to describe the statement of the problem concerning the data. In referring to Creswell (2008), primary sources are the most sought after historical research. Historic research may involve interpretation to recapture the nuances, personalities, and ideas that influence these events, and the expected research outcome is to communicate an understanding of past events (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher used documents, such as published materials on Iranian history, Indian history, Art of the Islamic period, and scholarly works regarding the history of the Iranian and Indian art in the Mughal dynasty. In addition, travellers' accounts that had been produced in Persian or English were reviewed for any details contained therein that were relevant to this study. All of the collected data were considered as a separate type of source or as a subcategory of documents.

## **3.6.** Method of analysis

All the instruments used relate to resources about the motifs of Iranian and Indian wooden objects. The resources comprise books and articles about the Islamic era and Mughal dynasty. For analysing the samples, the Visual semiotic and Iconology and Iconographic theories were used (Figure 3.3). However, the process of the data involves formal analysis,

studying the Visual semiotic and Iconology and Iconographic theories and qualitative analysis during the historical research method.

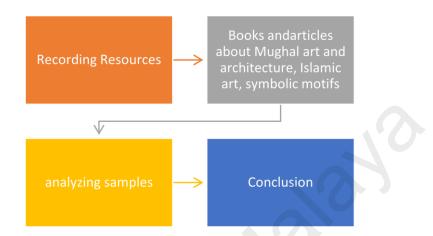


Figure 3.3: Method for analyzing wooden motifs by the researcher (Author)

As a qualitative research, the thematic method should include inductive analysis going from particular or detailed data to general codes and subjects. Moreover, at first, the researcher read the texts several times for a better understanding for data collection. Then the researcher focused and reviewed the purpose of the evaluation and what to find and identified a few key questions. The researcher then tried to identify motifs and organize them into coherent categories. Finding a list of key points or important findings, and, as a result, discovered that categorizing and sorting data are the end of the process. The case study reports are extensively descriptive, with the most problematic issue referred to being the determination of the right combination of description and analysis. Therefore, after identification of motifs all the collected data defined into four main groups to facilitate the process of interpretation based on the theories.

After data collection, everything became a part of the text, and were changed to written form and typed. The notes taken from books and articles were collected thematically. Then the issues about each theme were identified by one code and put in one group.

## **3.7.** Theoretical framework

## 3.7.1. Iconology and iconography

Iconography ordinarily refers to historical documentation through imagery. In a dictionary definition, "Iconography is described as the study of traditional images or symbols". The term iconology today is accepted as referring to the description and classification of images by art historians. Iconography is that division of the history of art, which concerns the subject matter or the meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form. It is the knowledge of identification, description, classification, and interpretation of symbols, themes, and subject matter in the visual arts; in addition, the term can refer to the artist's use of this imagery in a particular work.

In art studies, Iconography is the description and systematization of typological agreements and systems used in the representation of either person of narratives scenes. Panofsky advanced Iconography as the basis of a method of research dealing with the subject matter of works of art. In order to obtain a true understanding of a work of art, it is necessary to regard iconography not as an end in itself but as a system in union with a comprehensive research of the social and aesthetic aspects of art (Holly, 1985).

According to Erwin Panofsky (1982), iconology is a description and classification of images, much as ethnography is a description and classification of the human race; it is a limited and, as it were, ancillary study that informs us to when and where specific themes were visualized by which specific motifs (Hatt, 2006).

Amir Nasri, in an article (2010) about iconography and iconology declares that "iconography" and "iconology" are a means of art study that have been given in the twentieth century. In the Muslim world, although in a different historical era, iconography has been denied, Islamic painting and calligraphy are considered as Islamic iconography. Namely, icons are not just paintings and pictures, Panofsky believed that this method for the study of images includes all of art history not just for a specific era or specific style. The first stage, is pre-iconography, which is described as when we see an artwork, we can only describe it, regardless of whether we have science to art or not. At this stage, we have an obvious concrete statement of art works such as line, surface, and composition. In other words, our dealings are with tangible things.

However, not all questions in our life are objective and natural implications. Panofsky in this case has an example: in the Western culture, if we do not know the meaning of remove the hat in the encounter with a Westerner, we cannot understand the meaning of remove the hat, so we cannot explain it. There is another meaning called the secondary meaning or agreement meaning. If we know the internal rules of a culture or we grow up in that culture, we can understand that culture.

In conclusion, agreement meanings are not universal, but some communication exists as an accord. Perhaps we see a culture in which removing a cap is not a sign of respect, but is offensive. Therefore, iconographical analysis is equal with analysis of the secondary meaning or agreement meaning. In artwork also, the artist uses symbols and allegories deliberately (Nasri, 2010).

According to Nasri (2010), in the iconography of each nation, it must be known the background of the political, social and religious culture of people. Namely, audience and art historians of artworks cannot undertake iconographical analysis based on the formal properties of works of art, and they need to know the background of that culture to know

the intent of the compiler. One of the ways of knowing the intent of the compiler is to be familiar with the literature in terms of narrative. Therefore, in iconographical analysis, using the literature and dependence of the subject on the literature is one of the most important criterions. The third stage is the iconological approach. In this approach, it is not just appeared to be, it must be done interpretive analysis. In the iconological approach we do not analyse deliberate states, but we are looking for unconscious, non-deliberate states in artworks (Nasri, 2010).

The approach is a synthetic approach, in that the search has not been done for conscious states in this approach or iconology. In this level, the different data got separated from the artwork and then put them together to interpret the artwork. In this position, we confront the world-view of that time. As an example, consider an Iranian artist who is separate from his/her culture and does not know about the art before him/ herself. If the artist uses Iranian symbols and art in his/her work unconsciously, namely the artist takes effect of the current world-view in his/her society unconsciously. In fact, iconology is about the unelaborate influence and suggests, in many cases, that the artist does not have a clear conscious intent. Based on the explanation, in the first part, the researcher will identify what types of motif are used on the wooden objects of both countries. The motifs can be of vegetal motifs, figurative, calligraphy or geometrical motifs.

After identifying the motifs, in the second level, the researcher will discover the origins of the motifs found on the wooden objects that will reveal various aspects of both Iranian and Indian cultures.

Lastly, after identifying the origin of the motifs, the researcher will realize the motifs and design and their importance to the country of origin and the other country. The relation

between the motifs on the wooden objects in Iran with those of India will be determined. In this part of the study, the researcher will consider the information gathered from the books, journals and her own points of view (Panofsky, 1982).

## **3.7.2.** Theory of Visual semiotic

Surrounded with symbols, images and various signs, human being has always strived to signify them and utilized for communication. The meaning comes out of an interaction between the message and its reader. While handling a text, one must consider not only its components but also the relation between those components, all the impressions it has created and the techniques used for creating such impressions as well. When the images urge us to react, we are aware of its effect upon us, which is resulted from myths, ideologies and connotations embedded in the images. Only through a sophisticated analysis, the hidden meaning under the obvious one could be formed. Visual semiotics deconstructs the communicative visuals while in its attempt to attain the meaning and ideology. Human being is acquainted with this signs throughout his life learning to use and signify them.

Reading is one of the most essential activities carried out by humans when encountered with a meaningful construction. It occurs in three basic levels: Perception, memorizing and interpretation and reconstruction of the signs (Parsa, 2004). A literary or musical work of art, a portrait as a visually meaningful construction, in other words, the entire body of any kind of images designed for creating a meaning can be read, signified and analysed by the perceptive skills of its reader.

Every text produced by the means of mass communication is a fictitious world reaching its audience or its reader with a certain narrative form; however, this fictitious world gains a

meaning through the encircling real world. The relations and the information in the fictitious world are interpreted through an analysis done in the light of the information of real world.

Semiotics (semiology in Europe) is the science of signs. Semiotic analysis is used in the study of sign processes in various fields such as communication, linguistics, anthropology, art, architecture, medicine and so on. Semiotics was first described by its founder, Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1985) as 'a science that studies the life of signs within a society'. Simultaneously, American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce published his own ideas about the effect of sign on society.

The sign is the key term in any semiotics. A sign is simply anything that stands for something else. The 'stands for' process is the point where meaning is created both through encoding (by the source) and decoding (by the receiver or reader) as in these stylized representations of people (Moriarty, 1994). But what is not sign? According to Paul Martin Lester (2000), "that is a good question because almost any action, object or image will mean something to someone somewhere. Any physical representation is a sign if it has meaning beyond the object itself." Consequently, the meaning behind any sign must be learned. And also Umberto Eco stressed, "Signs are correlated with what they stand for on the basis of a rule or a convention" (Eco, 1985:196). Thus, if signs which are understood by the receiver or reader are used in a work of art, images will be much more memorable and interesting.

A sign can be a word, a sound, or a visual image. Saussure (1985) divides linguistic signs into two components--the signifier (the sound, image, or word) and the signified, which is the concept the signifier represents, or the meaning. As Berger (1990) points out, the

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problem of meaning arises from the fact that the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and conventional. In other words, signs can mean anything, and they can mean different things to different people. The arbitrariness is true in most written and spoken language; however it is clear that visual signs are not arbitrary.

The American cognitive philosopher Peirce for the production of meaning has his own suggested model. According to Peirce's the sign system; "A sign... [In the form of a representamen] is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen' (Peirce 1931-58, 2.228). The interaction between the representamen, the object and the interpretant is referred to by Peirce as 'semiosis' (ibid., 5.484)." (Quoted in Chandler, 2003)

The interaction between these triadic models is referred to the process of infinite semiosis. According to Currie (1995), on the semiotic view, all representation is conventional, and the idea that pictures might in some sense be like the things they picture is part of a benighted ideology of realism. C. S. Peirce categorized also the patterns of meaning in signs as iconic, symbolic and indexical.

"In iconic signs, the signifier represents the signified by apparently having a likeness to. This type of sign is often very important in visual images, especially photographic ones.

In indexical signs, there is inherent relationship between the signified and signifier. Index based on contiguity or causality: e.g., smoke as a sign of fire.

Symbolic signs have a conventionalized but clearly arbitrary relation between signifier and signified, as in Saussure's 'arbitrary' sign: e.g., a Lotus is a symbol for purity. In a society the meaning of this kind of symbols must be learn." (Rose, 2011).

In visual semiotics iconic signs look like its object. They are more 'motivated' signs. The indexical signs draw attention to the thing to which it refers. The symbol signs, - e.g. a five pointed star is a symbol of the five pillars of Islam – the profession of faith (*Shahadat*), daily prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and the pilgrimage to Mecca– are unmotivated or arbitrary. In a different culture this sign may not signify the pillars of Islam.

Signs are both denotative and connotative. In semiotics, denotation and connotation are terms describing the relationship between the signifier and it's signified, and an analytic distinction is made between two types of signifieds: a denotative signified and a connotative signified (Chandler, 1994).

Meaning includes both denotation and connotation. The denoted meaning is the objects or motifs. Connotation is the ideas of creating them which are invisible.

#### **CHAPTER 4**

### 4. **RESULTS**

#### 4.1. Introduction

Talking about symbols and concepts is more important and interesting when one can bridge between two different cultures and establish that the symbols have evolved from the simplest and most fundamental forms.

The present chapter focuses on the actual theme, describing and classifying the known motifs of Iranian and Indian woodwork and attempting to interpret them. Firstly, the samples of woodwork are described and then an attempt is made to identify the vocabulary of the decorative forms. What is necessary now is to provide an evaluation of the major stylistic tendencies. Of course, it is true that artistic themes on woodwork cannot be separated from artistic themes or other media. Thus, in this chapter, we present the prevailing Islamic styles and the sources from which they originate.

## 4.2. Identification of motifs of Iranian wooden objects

For the study of the motifs of Timurid wooden arts, the motifs of five different wooden doors were used.

#### 4.2.1. Imamzadeh (mausoleum) Yahya wooden door leaves

*Imamzadeh Yahya* of Sari state is a mausoleum built in 1442-46 A.D. to house the remains of a descendant of Imam Musa Kazem. The door leaves from the *Yahya* Mausoleum is one of the few objects of woodwork to have survived from the Timurid period. it undoubtedly owes its extraordinary state of preservation to the temperateness and aridity of *Mazandaran*'s climate as well as to the reverence with which it has been treated over the centuries.

The carving is deep and the door leaves are symmetrically decorated with abstracted floral units. The leaves are made of vertical and horizontal panels attached to the two side's vertical cross beam (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Wooden door leaves, wood carving, Timurid Period, Yahya Mausoleum, Sari, Iran (Author)

The three central panels form the main subject of the decoration. All the other panels and crossbeams are frames for these central panels. The field is rich in *khataee*, arabesque, geometric and calligraphy motifs. For decoration the middle and biggest panel, the classical

design with a long medallion and corner decoration or *Lachak-O-Toranj* is used. Moreover, in each corner around one quarter of the central medallion repeats. Around the leaf and each panel, there is a border in which wavy stem designs (*Guilloche*) are displayed. The wavy stem is based on a twisted alternating stem, arranged in symmetrical order.

Each of the three central panels is decorated with rows of curled stems. In the medallion (*toranj*), the artist uses a stem, rising up from the central lotus as a tree rises up, but not quite similar to the natural growth of the tree. These, in turn, originate from conventionalized *palmette* and scrolls each of which contain three lobes. The filler between the inner shape and the outer part is composed of the trefoil and *Jasmin* flowers, which are connected with running foliate scrolls (Figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2: Detail of wooden door, Arabesque and khataee Motifs, Yahya Mausoleum, Sari, Iran (Author)

An abstracted flower with three petals and holes between the lobe rings connects the base and the neck. The empty spaces around the medallion are fully covered with a flake fish pattern (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3: Detail of wooden door, arabesque and khataee motifs, Yahya Mausoleum, Sari, Iran (Author)

The inside of the heart shape of the middle panel and also the upper *palmette* shape are filled with two or three petal blossoms and holes between the lobe rings connecting the base and the neck. These blossoms are represented with veins, which make it look very close to the natural origin. For connecting the conventionalized trefoil calyxes, different types of stem were used like twisted stems; double bent stems, which are two twisted stems that unite together at the top; and split stems which are the opposite shape of the double bent in that the stem splits into two twisted stems with a decorative line in the middle.

Twisting the stem in such a form could be considered the first step of conventionalizing the natural motif.

The upper panels of the door leaves are decorated with five *lancette* shape motifs, filled by a conventionalized trefoil calyx with pointed head and two concave sepals springing from a stalk (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4: Detail of wooden door leaf, panel and frame technique with *khataee* motifs, Yahya Mausoleum, Sari, Iran (Author)

The lowest panels of both leaves of the door are decorated by an Arabic epigraphy in *Thuluth* script. The epigraphy includes the name of the craftsman and a blessing script to him. In hand leaf mentioned the name of *Fakhr Al Din ibn Ali ibn Ostad Najar* ( فخر الدين اين اين المتاد):

Fakhr al din son of Ali, son of master carpenter (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: Lowest panel of door leaf, Arabic calligraphy, Thuluth script, Yahya Mausoleum, Sari, Iran (Author)

The script of the left leaf is *Sahebe Rostam ibn Nezam* (صاحب رستم ابن ناظم), which is the name of the patron of the Mausoleum (Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6: Lowest panel of door leaf, Arabic calligraphy, Thuluth script, Yahya Mausoleum, Sari, Iran (Author)

Both epigraphic motifs are made on the plain background in the *Thuluth* script with some words on top of the other. The relief is not as deep as the arabesque and *khataee* motifs.

## 4.2.2. Imamzadeh Ghasem wooden door leaves

The next enchanting sample belongs to *Ghasem Imamzadeh* in *Babol* city of *Mazandaran* Province (Figure 4.7). What distinguishes this door from the other samples is the transom window of the door. As shown in the following figures the quality of decoration of the transom window of the door is even higher than the main door with a variety of motifs used to decorate the wooden transom.



Figure 4.7: Wooden door leaves, *Ghasem* Mausoleum, *Babol*, Iran (Author)

The symmetrical motifs of these door leaves are included *khataee*, arabesque, geometric and epigraphy. However, the geometric design is more dominant than the previous sample. The leaves are made of vertical and horizontal panels attached to the two side vertical crossbeams. As usual the middle panel is much bigger than the other two panels.

The important feature of this door is the *Thuluth* Quranic calligraphy covering the whole frame of the door which is more luxurious than the other samples.

In this sample, the floral elements are in more defined enclosures, such as, stars, triangles, squares, rectangles, arches and circles. Thus, the unnatural floral forms are distributed in a garden of the artist's own planning, and not of nature's design. No link to nature is followed, and, thus, the artist fulfilled his obligation to both nature and his faith. It can be said that this sample is interplay between the vegetal and the geometric.

In this door leaf, the artist not only conventionalized the vegetal forms but he also used geometric elements. He used the interwoven line and derived all possible forms out of it; such as the triangle, the incomplete square, circle, hexagon, and six-pointed star.

One of the geometric forms used in this sample was the curve, and, out of it, was the circle – concentric, tangent, and festooned. As a combination of lines and circles the artist uses the guilloche, which is a band forming two successive parallel rows of interlaced circles. A particularly distinctive feature of the design of the leaves of this door is the geometric grid that organizes the decoration of its transom. Patterns based on hexagons are ubiquitous in Islamic art and transoms with this pattern are indeed very common in the Mughal period.

The tympanum panel and its inscription are extremely valuable. The central compartment in between the text features is a close-meshed reticulated pattern of angular interlacing strap work, radiating from a six-pointed star in the centre. The enclosed hexagons contain floral ornaments, full lotus blossoms presented in top view, and small-scale arabesques mainly of superimposed, lyre shaped pairs of half *palmettes*, all executed meticulously and with great technical capacity.

The whole compartment is framed with a band of arabesque motifs. The ornament consists of a scroll with conventionalized *palmette* leaves (Figure 4.8).

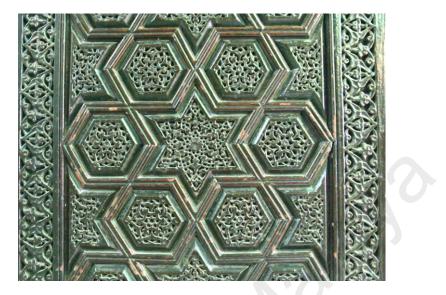


Figure 4.8: Arabesque, *khataee* and geometric motifs in wooden door leaf, *Ghasem* Mausoleum, *Babol*, Iran (Author)

The lowest panels are set in the form of a rectangle and carved with *Quranic* texts whose polished letters contrast sharply with the scrolling arabesque tracery of the ground. In the inscription sinuous, smooth, rounded letters appear against a lacy vegetal ground. The designer of these inscriptions took great pains to achieve balance, not only between the letters and the ground but also among the letters themselves. Thus, in this floriated *thuluth*, at the end of one inscription a pair of twisted stems are inserted that have no semantic value but serve to break up the expanse of arabesque ground above the letters. Similarly, the letters D ( $_2$ ) and R ( $_3$ ) are visually extended upward by a *palmette* (Figure 4.9).

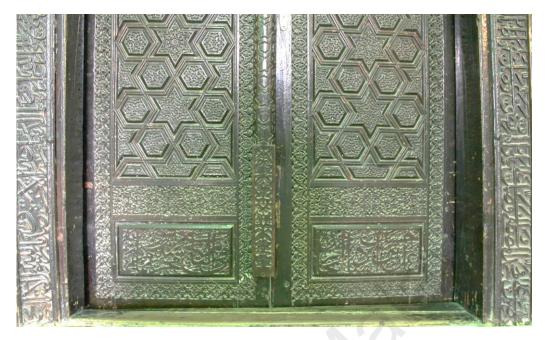


Figure 4.9: Calligraphy and arabesque motifs, Ghasem Mausoleum, Babol, Iran (Author)

The calligrapher spread a floral decoration on the background and gave us the feeling of continuity by hiding parts of the scrolls beneath the characters. The vegetal themes originating from the scrolls are the conventionalized winged forms. The *Wau* ends with a curve, which tapers at the end. The artist developed from the Ra and abstracted, vegetal decoration, i.e. a looped stem ending with two winged forms, which are an abstracted form of acanthus. It represents the tangent, interlaced, lobed forms.

The inscriptions include decorative arrangements of the words Allah, Ali, and Muhammad, and blessings upon the Prophet and the Twelve Imams. In addition, they provide us with information concerning who made the door. This inscription is obviously of the utmost importance, since it gives a precise date for the commencement of work on the door and the name of the artist, and the precise date confirms that the door belongs to the Timurid dynasty. In the beginning of the inscription there are Shi'a prayers for the Prophet Muhammad and twelve imams in the *Thuluth* script up to Al Mahdi:

اللهم صلّ على مجد المصطفى و صل على على المرتضى ....

The script was finished with a *Hadis* by Prophet Muhammad:

The Prophet, the Messenger of Allah and peace the world hereafter

قال النبى رسول الله وسلم الدنيا مزرعة الآخرة الحديث

The name of the craftsman for the calligraphy is Master Hussain ibn Ahmad carpenter:

(Figure 4.10) عمل استاد حسین بن احمد نجار



Figure 4.10: Calligraphy and Arabesque motifs in wooden door leaf, *Ghasem* Mausoleum, *Babol*, Iran (Author)

And the precise date mentioned on the left leaf of door is 870/1491:

(Figure 4.11) في التاريخ محرم سنه تسعون ثمانيه



Figure 4.11: Panel of wooden door leaf, precise date of manufacturing, Ghasem Mausoleum, Babol, Iran (Author)

Between the compartments there is a horizontally perpendicular band curved in an excellent way. It consists of a continuous band of interlacing bas-relief foliate scrolls – a symmetric composition of overlapping stalks, which develop in pairs into interlacing leaves at the pattern's central axis. The decoration contains floral ornaments, trefoils presented in top view, and small-scale arabesques mainly of superimposed, and half *palmette* leaves.

There are two other epigraphs in the highest panels of both leaves including the Arabic God blessing. The right side panel mentions God brightening Doors.

الله مفتح الأبواب

The left panel is God grant success:

(Figure 4.12) الله ولى التوفيق



Figure 4.12: panel of wooden door leaf, Quranic verses, Ghasem Mausoleum, Babol, Iran (Author)

The most impressive thing of this door transom window is the elaborate compartment. This style does not represent any natural motifs. However, the vegetal elements that are conventionalized are the *palmette*, trefoil, pansy or ivy leaves, and the acanthus (*Chang e Dahan Ajdari*) with elongated edge. The two lower foils of Acanthus have rolled-in bases. The upper one is elongated and pointed. The form has two stems and decorative lines. It has a symbolized shape, which makes it look like a badge. This unnatural style led to the creation of botanical combinations, which do not belong to each other (Figure 4.13).



Figure 4.13: Transom of wooden door decorated with *khataee*, arabesque and geometric motifs, *Ghasem* Mausoleum, *Babol*, Iran (Author)

Enormous conventionalized forms are used in this wooden transom. From the *palmette* the artist abstracted the rolled-in base, the lobed form, and the *palmette* with a hooked base and elongated edge.

The direct abstracted *palmette* (*Fleur-de-lys*) with a rolled-in base becomes rolled-in to be more imaginative and ornamental. This makes the form lose its relation with its natural origin. While direct, abstracted, lobed *palmette* is a rolled-in base where the outer side is tripled. There is the conventionalized acanthus, which fills several compartments, the single-pointed and the dual pointed.

Around the leaf and each panel there is border in which wavy stem (*Guilloche*) designs are displayed (Figure 4.14).

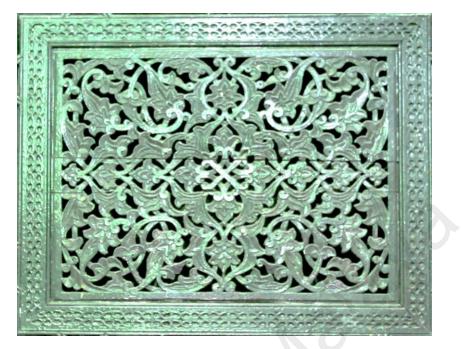


Figure 4.14: The *palmett* motifs, rolled-in base, hooked base, and with elongated edge, *Ghasem* Mausoleum, *Babol*, Iran (Author)

There are many forms of conventionalized stem used in this leaf, such as wavy, the scroll, the double scroll on straight stem, and the double bent stems that unite at the top. The conventionalized stem plays the first role in forming the linear decoration, or, in other words, in providing the framework for this decoration.

## 4.2.3. Cenotaph of Zain al Abedin mausoleum

The cenotaph of *Zain al Abedin* Mausoleum located in the city of Sari in *Mazandaran* state is one of the great examples of Timurid wooden art as well as the one of the finest specimens of wood work surviving from the Mughal era in the humid weather of the north of Iran (Figure 4.15). The shrine was originally constructed in 1448-50 (Baker & Smith, 2009b)

Like the other boxes, this box consists of a rectangular wooden structure. This wooden box was used for covering the grave of the martyr *Imamzadeh* Zeyn al-Abidin (Great grandson of Prophet Muhammad).

The panel has a remarkable design and a rich vocabulary of motifs and forms compiled and compressed in rhythmic tons of highly purified art. The lines run freely and smoothly. The motifs are well distributed and balanced. This wooden box is characterized by geometric patterns containing carved panels of stars and interlocking polygons that are incomplete squares designed to fill a corner.

The box consists of six rectangular panels on two sides and two rectangular panels on both the other sides. These panels were assembled with wooden pins and enclosed by carved frames that provide a flat surface for the decoration.

On the sides of one panel, the artist has emphasized the star and thus makes it the centre of attraction. It is the dream of the Muslim artists: a star in a heavenly sky. In addition, as Prophet Muhammad said: "My companions are stars: whomsoever any one of you follows, you will be rightly guided".

This drawing relates the decagon star to its peripheral pentagons through the inherent two five- pointed stars intrinsic to any decagon or star decagon. The decagon star is decorated with a lotus as a central motif covered by conventionalized interwoven stems.

The five-pointed stars have been drawn in solid and broken lines and the arms have been extended beyond the boundaries of their apices on the points of the central star decagon to form the basis of smaller five-pointed stars within pentagons. This pattern of tens and fives is fundamental to a host of traditional patterns in five-fold symmetry – one might call it the master plan underlying the various expressions.



Figure 4.15: Wooden box, wood carving, Zain al Abedin Mausoleum, Sari (Author)

On the other side, the most prominent (and best preserved) decoration consists of an interlace pattern generated from a six-pointed star. In general, the panel comprises four complete six- pointed stars, six incomplete six-pointed stars and fourteen hexagons. Even the small spaces between the main lotus motifs and the frame are not left bare, but are filled with tiny three petal blossoms, oval leaves, exquisitely fine arabesques of scrolling vines with characteristic double stems that support the motifs like *palmettes*, abstracted half *palmettes* and blossoms. All the panels are surrounded by two narrow borders. All the panels are exactly the same and those are symmetrical in design, either along a horizontal or vertical axis or along both. All the stars and hexagons have trellises generated by their outlines, through which grow the customary tendrils and leaves of the design (Figure 4.16).



Figure 4.16: Six- pointed star filled with *Khataee* and Arabesque motifs, wooden box, *Zain al Abedin* Mausoleum, *Sari* Mausoleum, *Sari* (Author)

The odd semi-triangular space between these four shapes and the corners of the panels are decorated with wavy stems, tendrils, and conventionalized trefoil and oval leaves (Figure 4.17).

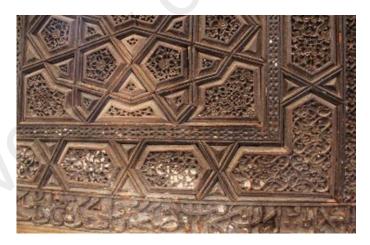


Figure 4.17: Semi triangular space filled with Khataee and Arabesque motifs, wooden box, Zain al Abedin Mausoleum, Sari (Author)

In the wooden box composition, the middle panel is completely different from the other two panels and includes one six-pointed star at the centre, and two hexagons, which are surrounded by seven bow shaped octagons (Figure 4.18).



Figure 4.18: Geometric shape decorated with khataee motifs wooden box, Zain al Abedin Mausoleum, Sari (Author)

An inscription band with Quranic text in an elongated *thulth* script runs along the box exterior stepped edges and the vertical strip. The lighter colour and several corrections are visible where the wood of the panels has fallen off. The vertical strip at the left side of frame contains a text that does not seem continuous with the rest of the inscription text and it is difficult to determine how it relates to the other text.

### 4.2.4. Imamzadeh Abbas Sari

The next sample is the door leaves of *Imamzadeh* Abbas in Sari city of *Mazandaran* state (Figure 4.19). The tomb was constructed after Imam Abbas, a son of Imam Musa, who appeared there in a vision in 1424. The inscription on the wooden door records that it was commissioned by *Aqa- Hussain* and made by *Bahram Ibn-e ostad* Mohammad *Najjar* (master carpenter) *Saravi* from *Sekandan*, and that its inscription was written by *Bahram Najjar*.

Based on the book of *Az Astara ta Estar-Abad*, the Corpus mission visited this Mausoleum in 1967 and reported an inscription dated 1448 on the ceiling of the shrine. The report of

this mission bears a note indicating that the building was restored in recent times (Sotudeh, 1375).



Figure 4.19: The wooden door leaves, Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Mazandaran (Author)

The transom window and the geometric decoration of the main panel of door has been changed to a magnificent wooden sample of the Timurid period. As shown in the following figures, the variety of motifs is used for decoration of the wooden transom. The frames are assembled with exposed mortise-and-tenon joints pegged together.

The patterns are incised and not so deeply cut. The board has five rectangular compartments and frames. The main compartment is bigger than the four other parts, which

is the other reason that makes this sample different from the other doors leaves. The shapes have a conventionalized and abstract vegetal and stem filling.

The door leaves are filled with geometric ornament, and floral style infill elements. The infill ornaments are mainly the simple pointed, abstracted, trefoil leaves, and a trefoil from the stalk. The other shapes are filled with abstracted forms of *palmette* leaves. This form is represented with a hooked base (Figure 4.20).



Figure 4.20: Geometric ornaments and floral style, wooden door leaves, *Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Mazandaran* (Author)

The carvings on the horizontal empty spaces consist of a continuous band of interlacing bas-relief foliate scrolls (*Guilloche*) a symmetric composition of four overlapping undulant stalks that develop into three petal blossoms, or two rows of three interlaced lines. Between the compartments, an interlacing scroll arises vertically. The only detail that makes the vertical interlaced line more decorative is the trefoil at the place of the cross lines (Figure 4.21).



Figure 4.21: Interlacing scrolls and geometric motifs in vertical and horizontal frames, *Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Mazandaran* (Author)

The artist ended the infinite decoration of interlaced lines on the stile with several geometric motifs like six-pointed stars and pentagons.

In the transom window decoration, the abstracted floral forms are distributed symmetrically on two lines: the central axis and the stems. The axis starts with double spirals topped with a petal; two *lancette* forms, one above the other; and a direct, abstracted, folded *palmette* with elongated edges; and a rolled-in-base, which is an indirect abstracted form of the double half-*palmette*. At the end of the branch there is a spiral form with two half-abstracted *palmettes* in an adorned and rolled-in base (Figure 4.22).

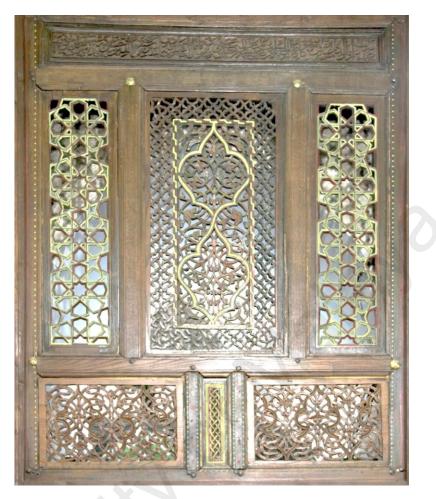


Figure 4.22: Abstracted floral form and stems, Transom window, Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Mazandaran (Author)

The lower part of the transom window is decorated with three main *Lancette* shape motifs, filled with various types of conventionalized forms, such as the *palmette* and the half abstracted *palmette*.

The direct abstracted *palmette* (*Fleur-de-lys*) with a rolled-in base becomes rolled-in to be more imaginative and ornamental. This makes the form lose its relation to its natural origin.

There are several forms of conventionalized stem used in this leaf, such as the scroll, the double scroll on straight stem, and the double bent stems that unite at the top. The conventionalized stem plays the first role in forming the linear the decoration or in other

words in providing the framework for this decoration. The linear features used in this style are the scroll, and the interlaced stem with a *lancette* in the base (Figure 4.23).



**Figure 4.23:** The main *Lancette* shape motifs filled with *palmette* motifs, *Imamzadeh Abbas*, *Sari*, *Iran* (Author) The middle part of the transom window panel is decorated with wicker-like strap-work and the rope is twisted into two knots (*Guilloche*) (Figure 4.24). The decoration applied to this *girih chini* follows the style in fashion at the time in *Ifriqiya*. Twisted rope, plaiting, curled interlacing work are all in fact used in the heritage of Byzantine themes, and also evokes Abbasid art with its profound Sassanid influences.



Figure 4.24: Geometric patterns based on hexagons and octagons, Transom window, Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Mazandaran (Author)

A particularly distinctive feature of this door leaves design is the geometric grids that organize the decoration of its transom. Patterns based on hexagons and octagons are ubiquitous in Islamic art, and transoms with these patterns are indeed very common in the Mughal period (Figure 4.25).



Figure 4.25: wicker like strap, the wooden rope is twisted into two knots, Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Iran (Author)

The frame of the transom window is bordered along a frieze with an Arabic inscription plaque recording the name of the Imam, the date of manufacture, the name of the master carpenter. This frieze employs an admirable style of *thuluth* epigraphy (Figure 4.26).



Figure 4.26: Arabic inscription, the frame of the transom window, *Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Mazandaran,* Iran (Author)

#### 4.2.5. Sultan Mohammad Taher shrine, Babol

The door leaves located in the Sultan Mohammad *Taher* shrine in *Mazandaran*, as shown in figure 4.27, are one of the ideal designs for examining the motifs used in the design during the Timurid period.

According to an existing inscription, the Sultan Mohammad *Taher* Mausoleum was built in 1496. The mausoleum is attributed to Sultan Mohammad *Taher*, the son of *Imam Kazem*. The building has two entrances, of which the one on the *Qeblah* side was stolen and replaced with a new one. The wooden door on the eastern side dates back to the late ninth century.

Despite structural gaps and additions – some parts of the frames are missing, and some of the original parts of the middle panel have been replaced – the decorative scheme of the door leaves can still be read. The frames are assembled with exposed mortise-and-tenon joints pegged together.

The three central panels form the main subject of the decoration. All the other panels and crossbeams act as the frames for these central panels. The field is rich in *khataee*, arabesque, geometric and calligraphy motifs. For decoration, the middle and biggest panel is in the classical design, with one ten-pointed star and eight hexagons that are filled with eight pentagons, and twenty rhombus shapes. Around the leaf and each panel, there is a border in which wavy interlaced stem designs (*Guilloche*) are displayed. However, the borders around the leaf are more decorative with abstract *palmette* (*Fleur-de-lys*) shapes between the interlacing wavy stems.



**Figure 4.27:** The door leaves located, Sultan Mohammad *Taher* shrine, *Babol, Mazandaran* (Author) In this sample, the floral elements are in a more defined enclosure, such as stars, triangles, pentagons, hexagons, rectangles, and rhomboids. It is interplay between the vegetal and the geometric.

In contrast with the other wooden door samples, the horizontal frames of the middle panels are more decorative than the vertical frames. On one side of the horizontal frame the carved inscription records that the door was made *by* Ali *ibn-Fakhr-Al din Najjar Razi* ( على على ), which means Ali son of *Fakhr Al din Razi* carpenter (Figure 4.28).



Figure 4.28: Vertical panel decorated with calligraphy, Sultan Mohammad *Taher* shrine, *Babol, Mazandaran* (Author)

On the other side the inscription mentions the name of the person who made the building, Molana Shams Al-din Nasr Allah Motahari (مولانا شمس الدين نصر الله مطهر).

On the upper panels, the artist emphasizes the six-pointed star and thus makes it the centre of attraction. These panels are occupied by two hexagons, two triangles, four bow shaped octagons, and half of several hexagons and bow octagon shapes. Even the small spaces between the main shapes and the frame are not left bare, but are filled with a tiny conventionalized central lotus in pentagons and hexagons; and three petal blossoms, and stems in other geometrical shapes. All the mortise-and-tenon joints are surrounded by two narrow borders (Figure 4.29).



Figure 4.29: Vertical panel decorated with calligraphy and geometric motifs, Sultan Mohammad Taher shrine, Babol, Mazandaran (Author)

For the lower horizontal frames, the artist uses double stems ending in trefoils and decorated with half abstract half *palmettes* on the edge of the frames (Figure 4.30).



Figure 4.30: Panel decorated with *khataee* and arabesque motifs, Sultan Mohammad Taher shrine, Babol, Mazandaran (Author)

The lower panels of the door leaves are decorated with *khataee* and arabesque motifs. For the decoration of the panel, two medallions or *Toranjs* were used. At the centre of each *Toranj*, there is a lotus and the artist has not left any space without a scroll, and abstracted half *palmettes*. Around the panel there is a border in which the scroll and the four petal blossoms design are displayed. Each of the *Toranjs* is decorated with rows of curled stems.

### 4.3. Timurid wooden art characteristics

Timurid wooden art, like other types of art, show the level of craftsmanship in this period. *Mazandaran* in northern Iran is renowned for being a centre of Timurid wooden objects because of its dense forests and sweetly scented *khalanj* wood.

The Timurid wooden objects represent two distinct techniques, frame and panel, and *girih chini*. The geometric motifs mostly include the eight-pointed star (*Hasht-o-tekkeh*, *Hahst-o-tabl, and Hasht-o-chahar Lengeh*), the six-pointed star (*Shesh-o-seli and shesh-o-tekkeh*) and ten-pointed star (*Dah-o-tond*). The main composition used in the Timurid period was the *Cross Toranj composition*. In this composition, the *Dahan Ajdari* and the angle of the central rhombus were overlapped and the stems of that came from the centre of the central rhombus. This composition just decorated the wooden door leaves.

The door leaves usually maintain the traditional tripartite division into three rectangular panels: a larger vertical one sandwiched between smaller ones. Mostly, the upper panels are inscribed and the lower ones contain a geometric medallion (*toranj*), however, the glory of the doors is the superb carving of the central panels. Those on the main portal contain arched cartouches of arabesque tracery, *palmettes*, three petals blossoms, and lotus on a delicate scrolling ground. The panels contrast with the framework of the valves, which are decorated with six- or eight-pointed stars, filled and bordered with delicate arabesques. Many of these motifs were developed from earlier woodcarving in Central Asia and Iran.

To complete the design of a Timurid wooden art, the artist needs to use *khataee* motifs in the work, since these motifs are a means to create discipline and unity between the components of his artistic work, such as between flowers leaves and blossoms. These are of more interest than any other design to him. Most of the decorations of the objects of this collection are a-natural, as it is a characteristic of Islamic decoration. While natural motifs are copied directly from nature, a-natural motifs are not copied directly from nature; however, they tend to illustrate a talented, artistic mentality that has deep senses and feelings of all the surroundings based on complete knowledge of geometry and mathematics. Natural motifs are easily described through their accepted scientific terms, such as a stalk, a branch, a tendril, a vine leaf, etc. Even without seeing the decoration one can imagine how these natural motifs look. On the other hand, it is difficult to determine the a-natural motifs of Islamic decoration, because there are no terms that automatically apply to them, and because the motifs are often together. It is not easy for an inartistic eye to know where the motif starts, ends, or even what its upright, correct shape is.

#### 4.3.1. The structure of design

The features of Timurid carved wooden doors include deep, intricately carved floral designs inherited from the preceding *Il-Khanid* period and reminiscent of Chinese lacquer ware; geometric patterns formed by the mortise-and-tenon technique; plaited borders; and panels inscribed with prayers and information about patrons, craftsmen, and dates of production.

The medallion is always located in the centre of the layout and the shape may be round, oval, rhomboid or radial of different sizes, which varies according to the taste and custom of the artists. Instead of a single medallion, we may find two or three medallions on the central line of objects. Usually on the top and bottom of the medallion there are two pendants (*Sar toranj*). One fourth of the medallion shape or something of a similar form when repeated in the corners of the field is named the corner *Lachack*; another favourite

was an alternation of elongated cartouches and central lotus, *palmettes*, split-leaf arabesques, scrolls, and small blossoms.

### 4.4. Interpretation of motifs

Although it is essential that the decoration should be studied according to certain rules, theories, and terms, which determine the frame, shape, and function of the art objects, there are no terms to describe the minor details inside the frame. It is in mathematics and geometry that we find the basis and the outline of the frames and shapes, from which we try to define the outline and devices of the ornament.

Natural motifs have certain outlines. A flower is a circle. Different conventionalized, abstracted, or symbolized forms of a flower cannot be described unless they are related to their closest natural forms. Therefore, we make an analysis of the decoration to help describe every a-natural motif terminologically.

The point we must take into account is that the arabesque view the world from a not-thisworldly dimension that has an abstract aspect. Although the elements that are used in the arabesque have been adopted from nature, they go beyond nature, they are neither showing nature nor its characteristics, and rather, their intention is to show the ephemerality of nature and desire to direct man's concentration to the other world. In this form of art, everything is in its ideal shape. In other words, the abstraction means being free from the material.

Even though the subject is vegetal, its construction appears from the first glance as uncommon, unusual, and, above all, unnatural. Signs of conventionalizing the motifs appear in originating a trefoil from two stems, which is uncommon in nature, and then projecting these two stems upwards, and joining them again with a link. This link is a sign of unification, which is not related to the artistic subject of the door leaf but something that arises from the subconscious mind of the artist, expressing the role of faith in creating a new united world. This is the philosophical interpretation of this decoration.

Lee Allane believes that the dome of the mosque has inspired the medallion design. He suggests that this motif was itself inspired by the inside of a mosque dome, with its central boss and intricately decorated surround. This scheme was first transposed into a wooden door in the 16th century, and has remained the dominant feature of Persian compositions ever since. Therefore, Islamic architecture has had a predominant role in inspiring Iranian art. As a result, we are of the opinion that Islamic Art has entered into the many facets of Islamic society and the appearance of the society is under the influence of this beautiful as well as sacred art (Allane, 1988).

### 4.4.1. Arabesque

The most popular arabesque motifs in the Timurid era were the half or abstract *palmette* and acanthus (*Chang Eslimi Sadeh and Dahan Ajdari*), vine scrolls and *palmette* (Figure 4.31).



Figure 4.31: The main *Lancette* shape motifs filled with *palmette* motifs and vine scrolls, *Imamzadeh Abbas*, *Sari*, Iran (Author)

The arabesque is a form of stylized vegetal ornament that centres on scrolling vines issuing *palmettes* and half *palmettes*, but which can also include ancillary elements arranged in a linear progression that is suitable for, but not limited to, borders or framing devices.

This limitless, rhythmical alternation of movement, conveyed by the reciprocal repetition of curved lines, produces a design that is balanced and free from tension. In the arabesque, perhaps more than in any other design associated with Islam, it is clear how the line defines space, and how sophisticated three-dimensional effects are achieved by differences in width, colour and texture.

In fact, the word arabesque originated from the Italian Renaissance term "a *rebesco*", which refers to the inherent nature of the decorative motif and means "with vines" or "with branches". In both cases the presence of leafy stems is implied, which in arabesque ornamentation were variously stylized. Over the centuries, the word has been applied to a wide variety of winding and twining vegetal decoration in art and meandering themes in music, however, it only properly applies to Islamic art.

Alois Riegl (1858-1905) was the first to characterize the principle features of the arabesque by making the stems of the vegetation geometrical, the particular vegetal elements used and the fact that these elements can grow unnaturally from one another, rather than branching off from a single continuous stem.

Arabesque essentially consists of acanthus leaves seemingly tossed by a subtle breeze, or intricately curled leafy vines and tendrils, sometimes forked to create the natural and continuous flow of the motif. It would be difficult to assign dates or regional attributions to objects only on the basis of the arabesques that adorn them, because this form of ornamentation is a shared and individual heritage, omnipresent in Islamic lands from Spain to China. Most probably, the actual vegetal elements of the arabesque were drawn from *Sasanian* art. In fact, it is one of the manifestations, albeit not the only one, that make Islamic art so distinctly Islamic.

Arabesque include, and for many centuries were limited to, acanthus and grape leaves, grape clusters and the derived, abstracted form usually known as the *palmette* (Figure 4.32). These elements became standard, and only in the 14th century were other vegetal forms, such as flowers, introduced into the arabesque, particularly in Persian and Turkish art (Riegl, 1992).



Figure 4.32: Lid 6th-7th century Sasanian period Silver and gilt H: 1.3 W: 12.4 D: 12.4 cm Iran (Author)

The fully geometrized arabesque appeared no earlier than the mid-10th century, when foliate motifs, such as the vine or acanthus scroll were made to interlace with geometric frames. At approximately the same time, the stem pattern of the vegetal scroll was assimilated to the geometric framework, and the stems of the scroll were given the shape of what had formerly been a non-vegetal pattern, or, conversely, the geometric framework came to life with leaves sprouting directly therefrom. The earliest datable example of this distinctive and original development may be found in carved marble panels, including those that flank the *mihrab* of the great Mosque of Cordoba.

The arabesque was displaced from the 14th century, both by freer designs employing chrysanthemum, peony motifs from Chinese art and by the new fantastic foliage of the SAZ style, which became popular under the Ottomans in the 16th century. Both kinds of foliage can be made into arabesques but, generally, were not treated in that fashion. By the late 17th century, the arabesque fell out of use as Baroque vegetal forms were imported into Islamic art and became extremely popular. In the 19th century, with the rise of Western interest in Islamic arts and crafts, traditional techniques and motifs, including the arabesque, were revived in the Islamic world. In some cases, these revivals proceeded openly, and objects were made in historical styles; in other cases historical styles were revived for the purpose of producing forgeries. Both of these trends have continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most arabesque designs being based on historical examples, rather than rendered in a new style.

# 4.4.1.1. Guilloche

A very mellifluous noun – from the French, as might be guessed – meaning a decorative pattern made up of multiple interlacing curved lines, which frequently also include round elements. Guilloche can be traditional or contemporary and can appear in a number of ways: carved into stone and applied architecturally, pieced together with mosaics for decorative floor or wall treatments, formed out of or pressed into metals for exterior or interior elements, drawn or painted onto panels, walls or paper, etc. This motif dates back to the Mesopotamian and Persian art of around 3000 BC.

During the excavation of *Sarzec*, the plaque was found to be decorated with the guilloche motif. This type of plaque, which was perforated in the centre and decorated with scenes incised or carved in relief, was particularly widespread in the Second and Third Early Dynastic Periods (2800-2340 BC), and have been found at many sites in Mesopotamia, and, more rarely, in Syria and Iran. The perforated plaque of *Dudu*, the high priest of *Ningirsu* in the reign of *Entemena*, prince of Lagash (c.2450 BC), belongs to this tradition. It has some distinctive features, however, such as being made of bitumen (Figure 4.33).



Figure 4.33: Relief of *Dudu*, priest of *Ningirsu* in the time of *Entemena*, *Lagash* C. 2400 BCE *Tello Bituminous* stone H. 25 cm; W. 23 cm; Th. 8 cm *De Sarzec* excavations (Kalyanaraman, 2015)

There is another rare sample belonging to Iran in the same period that shows the use of guilloche or twisted rope in 2400 BC (Figure 4.34).



Figure 4.34: Fragment of an Iranian Chlorite Vase decorated with the lion headed eagle, temple of Ishtar. Dated 2500 - 2400 BC. Louvre Museum collection (Kalyanaraman, 2015)

## 4.4.2. Khataee motifs

# 4.4.2.1. Lottos

During the Timurid period, the most common *Khataee* motifs were three petal blossom, lotus, four petal *Jasmin* and trefoil calyx (Figure 4.35).

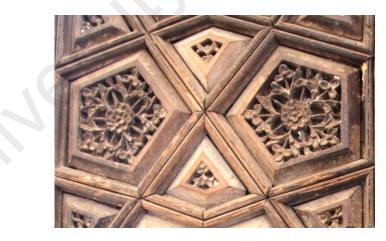


Figure 4.35: Detail of wooden cenotaph with lotus motif, Zain al Abedin Mausoleum, Sari (Author)

The lotus has played an important role in Iranian culture as indicated by the blue lotus, named *Nilufar* in Iranian, and which was found in Persia and India. It has been recorded that more than a thousand different *Nilufars* in stone relief were discovered in *Takht-e*-

*Janshid* during the Achaemenid dynasty. *Nilufars* were used as a design and decoration on cloth, on the edge of walls, on the weapons of kings and on beds. From evidence found by archaeologists, the *Nilufar* was a favourite flower during the Achaemenid dynasty (Figure 4.36. The shape of the blooming lotus is the symbol of spring and the sky powers; of the sun, warmth and life and when a soldier carries a lotus, it signifies peace and reconciliation. Since the lotus is such a significant flower in Iranian culture, it is therefore logical to associate the presence of the lotus on wooden objects with Iranian art and culture (BolkhariGhahi, 2005).



Figure 4.36: Stairway of *Apadana* Palace at Persepolis, Achaemenid Ceremonial Capital, 5th-4th Century BCE (Author)

The studies show that the lotus motif is rooted in ancient Iran and the sun worshipping religion. It is shown that the sun is born in the water and it is on a lotus flower, for this reason, the lotus was converted into the main motif in Iranian art (Critchlow, 1976b).

Among the more common signs spread in the art of the Near East, the lotus certainly occupies a relevant position. Although it could be considered a flower at first glance, there are good reasons to also consider it as an astronomical-astrological symbol.

In ancient Sumerian sources the goddess *Inana* is clearly connected to the lotus according to its use as an astral symbol. In the art of *Uruk*, the image of the lotus was interchangeable

with the symbol of the goddess *Inana* and it was expressed through the cuneiform sign *Dingir*, the same one used to represent the star. Furthermore, in early dynastic semipictographic inscriptions, stars and lotus substituted the sign *Dingir*. In this way, the identity between the symbol for star-divinity and flower was commonly used in Mesopotamian art (Moortgat Correns, 1994). The relief at *Sar-i Pul zahab* (third millennium BCE) in Iranian *Kurdista*n constitutes an excellent example of an early representation of Near Eastern art where it is possible to observe the association of the goddess *Inana-Ištar* with an eight-pointed star that is the remains of the lotus motif in her proximity (Figure 4.37).



Figure 4.37: Lullubi relief, Sar-e Pol-e Zahab, Anubanini Relief, Iran, 2000/1930 BCE (Compareti, 2007)

Astral symbols were also known outside proper Mesopotamia. In fact, the lotus represented as a flower has also been clearly used as a star or the sun connected to the religious sphere in Anatolia since very ancient periods. It was later accepted in ancient Greece, and, particularly, among the Hellenistic kingdoms that arose after the fall of Alexander's Empire. The same Macedonian ruling house had a strict connection with the eight-pointed star, which, since the 4th century BCE, has been used as a kind of official emblem. According to Hellenistic culture, the astral symbols (especially the star) had apotropaic properties. For this reason it has been represented specifically on the shields in Greece since the 5th-4th centuries BCE and also in the Iliad it is described as the decoration of *Achilles armor* (Compareti, 2007).

The Indo-Aryans, in fact, kept in high esteem everything connected to the horse and the war-chariot. On a seal belonging to king *Sauštattar*, dated c. 1420 BCE, embellished with very complex symbols, it is also possible to observe a winged pole with an eight-pointed star in a circular frame on the top (Figure 4.38). The elements that constitute this device have been associated with the turning pillar of the Vedic chariot race described in that literature as a winged one, while the solar wheel at its top should call to mind the concept of *cakravartin*, literally the one who possesses the turning of the wheel (Parpola, 2002).

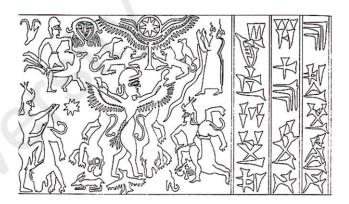


Figure 4.38: Seal of the *Mitannian* king *Sauštattar*, c. 1420 (Parpola, 2002)

Surprisingly, there are several samples of using the exact symbol of lotus (rosette) in Syrian sea of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century BC. In one of the seals, the interceding goddess Lama faces a Syrian ruler. Between the two figures is a winged sun-disc that the disc is shaped like a lotus.

The inscription names the owner as *Matrunna*, daughter of *Aplahanda*, servant-girl of the goddess *Kubaba*. *Aplahanda* is known to have been king of Carchemish, on the Euphrates, during the early years of the 18<sup>th</sup> century BC (Figure 4.39).



**Figure 4.39:** Syrian cylinder seal, 18<sup>th</sup> century BC, 2.4×1.2 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Arts, New York (Collon, 1990)

The rosette appears among the decorations of the Achaemenid sovereigns and aristocrats both on the headgear and garments exactly as in the combination with divinities in accordance with the past Mesopotamian tradition (melikian Chirvani, 1992; Shahbazi, 1992). *Anahita* was also represented in ancient Persian art according to different iconographical formulae later to be completely abandoned. The image of the goddess with a rayed nimbus and standing on a lion as it appears on a seal in the State Hermitage Museum was borrowed by the Achaemenid directly from *Urartian* and *Assyro-Babylonian* art (Figure 4.40) (Moorey, 1979).

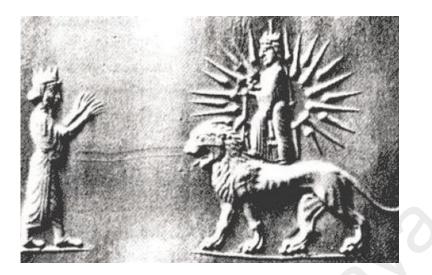


Figure 4.40: Achaemenid seal. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum (Moorey, 1979)

The astral symbology attached to *Anahita* is expressed in the Achaemenid seal by the rayed nimbus, which renders the rays of a star in the shape of the petals of a lotus. Astral symbols also appear among the reliefs of the Achaemenid kings at Persepolis and *Naqš-e Rostam*, possibly, referring specifically to the Zoroastrian texts on the gradual passage of the soul of the deceased to the sky through the stars, moon and sun.

Before extending the present investigation to *Sasanian* art, it would be interesting to report what is said in the sacred *Mazdean* texts. In the *Zend-Avesta*, in a passage of the long *Yašt* V dedicated to Anahita (Aban Yašt) it is stated that she has a chariot, she wears a mantle fully embroidered with gold, and she also wears a golden crown with a hundred stars, with eight rays a well-made crown, in the shape of a *ratha*, chariot (Compareti, 2007).

In *Parthian* and *Sasanian* coinage, astronomical-astrological symbols are represented frequently in connection to the royal portraits (Gariboldi, 2004).

In the coinage of *Ardašir I* (224-241) the star appears to be isolated or united with the crescent with six, seven or eight rays on the headgear (Figure 4.41). Among the harnesses

of the horses in the *Persepolitan* graffiti, the lotus also reappears with various numbers of petals (or rays) reproduced quite crudely.



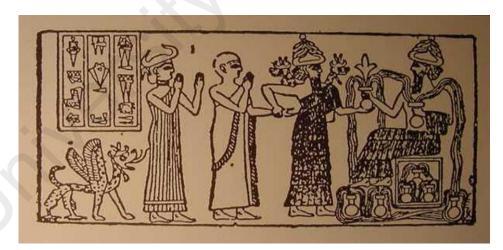
Figure 4.41: the silver coin of Ardašir I (224-241), British museum, London (Compareti, 2007)

The star represented as a lotus on the objects just mentioned was clearly conceived as a divine symbol in which the sacral value was used in different media to emphasize the royalty, and, most likely, to legitimize the power of the *Sasanian* sovereigns and their dynasty. The divine character of the astral symbology possibly reflects proper concepts of Persian culture as regarding the relationship between the super-human *Sasanian* sovereigns and the luminaries that have only been preserved indirectly through external literary sources (Azarpay, 1972) and, as already observed, in the coinage (Gariboldi, 2004). Generally, from an Iconographic point of view Flower= Sun in Persian art.

## 4.4.2.2. Fleur-de-lys

*Fleur-de-lys* is literally translated from French as "flower of the lily". There is some claim that this motif traditionally belongs to the French, because it has been used to represent French royalty, and, in that sense, it is said to signify perfection, light, and life. However, there are many samples that represent the connection of these motifs to Mesopotamia.

The seal of *Gudea* (Sumerian chief) shows a *fleur-de-lys* motif (Figure 4.42). In this seal, the Sumerian gods *Enki* and *Enlil*, sons of the god *Anu*, who came down to Earth according to Sumerian mythology, are illustrated together with *Gudea*. *Enki's* attributes as seen above is a double-headed snake, often shown with the horned crown of divinity and dressed in the skin of a fish. *Enki* played the pivotal role in saving humanity from the global Deluge, and was also credited with the creation of mankind and bestowing the secrets of life and death, through a ritual beverage (Soma) and self-sacrifice. *Enki's* emblem was the serpent or two serpents entwined on a staff – the basis for the winged caduceus, a symbol used by modern Western medicine. According to Vedic literature, the Gods got together at the beginning of time and churned the ocean to extract a substance that would offer them immortality. According to Richard Williams, The Gods agreed to share this mighty elixir, calling it *Amrita*, or *Amrit* which is a Sanskrit word for "nectar", a sacred drink, or Holy Ambrosia, that grants their gods immortality (Williams, 2009 ).



**Figure 4.42:** he Seal of *Gudea* shows him with his head bared, being led and followed by deities to stand before *Enlil*, the chief Sumerian god. *Gudea* is the only figure without horns, which are a symbol of divine status, ca. 2100 B.C (Woolley & Woolley, 1965)

Note, in the drawing above, the offering is of a sacred beverage to a female (fertility, or mother goddess) with an encoded *fleur-de-lys* emblem. As it is drawn, the *fleur-de-lys* 

emblem is most probably an esoteric symbol of the Soma beverage and of divine immortality.

A textile fragment that is clearly indebted to earlier *Sasanian* design traditions is another example of using *fleur-de-lys* in the pre-Islamic period of Iran (Figure 4.43). In this textile, twin horse showed with a *fleur-de-lys* between them. The roundel over the animals' forelegs – which looks rather like a Royal Air Force emblem – is a non-naturalistic element that was to prove unusually tenacious in later Islamic animal depictions.



Figure 4.43: Sassanian fragment 6th-8thc twin horses, Iran (Woolley & Woolley, 1965)

# 4.4.2.3. Toranj

The other common vegetal form in the Mughal period is the *toranj*, which is made by the combination of Arabesque and *khataee* motifs (Figure 4.44). A *toranj* normally has two sides, the upward side and downward side. In Sufism, the upward side is the symbol of greatness of the soul and the downward is the symbol of falling down by God's generosity. The *toranj* is the sterilized form of Cypress that is the most symbolic plant in the pre-Islamic era (Figure 4.45) (kiyan mehr et al., 2004).



Figure 4.44: Torang with arabesque and khataee motifs, Imamzadeh yahya, Sari, Iran (Author)



Figure 4.45: Tree of life, Cedar tree, Achaemenid period, Persepolis, Shiraz, Iran (Author)

*Suhrawardi* states that the beliefs of ancient scholars were based on the origins of light. The presence of a stable light element in art and the insight it represents continues. An example

of the use of light in traditional art forms appears as cypress patterns in paintings and roundels in architecture and carpets (kamal, 2008; Tahoori, 2006).

For Iranians, the permanent revival of national tradition had an everlasting attraction. These national traditions, in most cases, were doubtfully observing the demands of the art that had been imported by the Arabs and also to the demands that were expressed in the direction of the *Arabizatian* of the attitudes and traditions, and opposed to becoming merely Arabized, which was achieved through the calm composition of its own tradition with an Arab world-view. These circumstances were the products of inner-directed decorative art, which has been in existence since the Sassanid period and could provide those designs, with little toleration and neglect of its own specific symbols. They constitute essential points of view of Islamic art. Moreover, this combination of the two cultures shows Sassanid abstraction and a specific method in art, which could be embraced in a calm and deliberate manner. This composition led to the result that in the conflict between the visual elements of two art plant designs and branching forms, and also herbaceous designs including flower bowls and engravings similar to rose flowers and palms with leaves and other similar shapes, it could dominate the other figures, and, finally, these forms became established.

### 4.4.2. Geometric motifs

Geometry is a science that leads to an understanding of essence and substance. It is a key component for other forms of knowledge and wisdom. Some scholars have claimed that the foundation of all scientific and practical knowledge is the perception of essence, which can be more fully understood through the study of geometry (the *Ikhwan al-Safa*, geometry paper) (Bolkhari Ghehi, 2010a).

Geometry in art creates a holy space in which the presence of God is reflected. The foundation of this geometry is the circle, which is also symbolic of unlimited potential. From the circle, originates the three most fundamental figures in Islamic art. The first and simplest is the triangle, which originates from the expansion of one circle into three circles, and symbolizes human consciousness. Expanding the circle can give us the other two fundamental shapes of Islamic art, the square and the hexagon: A square often symbolizes earth and its materiality and a hexagon represents heaven (Critchlow, 1976a). From the Islamic perspective, dividing the circle into all possible equal arcs is symbolic of unity (Critchlow, 1976b). Nader Ardlan and Laleh Bakhtiar (1999) stated that geometric designs could be interpreted as abstract forms that are eternal and timeless. They can be seen as spiritual symbols through which mystical truths are revealed (Ardalan & Bakhtiar, 1999).

The *Ikhwan* stated that geometry precedes other sciences. They believe that God created the universe as circular with spheres of rotational motion. Based on their opinions, the circle was the most important geometric shape and they attempted to interpret all components as logical forms (Bolkhari Ghehi, 2010a). Geometrical patterns are said to be a conduit for spiritual truth. Geometric patterns are symbolic and can be infinitely expandable. According to the Islamic perspective, God creates diversity and multiplicity in unity and this is the most desirable geometric context for the Muslim craftsman or artist considering how a surface should be decorated. Direct expression of thought is shown by unity through multiplicity (Hejazi, 2005). Nasr in his book 'Science in Islam' claims that Muslims love mathematics, especially geometry and numbers. Geometry and numbers are directly related to Islam, which is the belief in monotheism. In the Islamic world, holy mathematics appears with great frequency in art (Bolkhari Ghehi, 2010b).

Geometric designs are abstracted forms using a visual language of form, colour and line to create a composition that may exist with a degree of independence from visual reverence in the world.

One frequently used geometric design is a roundel (Shayestehfar & Shakarpor, 2010). A roundel is created by placing a square on top of another square. It is also called a star because it is similar to certain celestial bodies. In terms of Islamic motifs, this shape is referred to as "*Shmsah*" (sun) (Mohebbi & Ashouri, 2005).

There is one class of geometrical pattern that Islam has developed as its own. This group comprises what one might term the "star patterns," since they include star-like motifs, linked or oriented according to certain precise rules to produce endlessly repeating twodimensional patterns. The star patterns are unquestionably the most beautiful and intricate of all Islamic patterns, and they owe their beauty in no small measure to a high degree of symmetry at all levels. It is not easy to establish the exact date at which the simple star patterns of this kind were first used in Islamic architectural decoration. Two of the earliest repeating patterns using simple rectilinear stars consisted of 6- and 8-pointed stars, respectively (Figure 4.46). In an Islamic context, the star-and-cross pattern first occurs in ninth century Samarra; a version of the pattern with 6-pointed stars occurs in the mosque of *Ibn Tulun* at Cairo (876-79). However, it probably appeared even earlier, since a rectilinear version occurs on one of the windows from *Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi*, in which all the line segments are extended as straight lines running in interlaced form right through the pattern (Creswell, 1919).

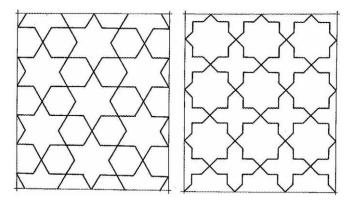


Figure 4.33: Two of the earliest rectilinear star patterns, *Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi* (Creswell, 1919)

The most typically "Islamic" of all the star motifs is the geometrical lotus. The prototype for the general n-rayed lotus almost certainly consisted of a 6-pointed star surrounded by six regular hexagons (Figure 4.47). The prototypical 6-rayed rosette seems to have been used for the first time as a distinct motif in the *Arab-Ata* mausoleum (978) at Tim, in Uzbekistan ,and the same pattern reappears, with slightly different proportions, on the earlier of the two *Kharraqan* tomb towers (Stronach & Young, 1966). A method of constructing the isolated 6-rayed rosette can be derived from the construction used to produce the original pattern of 6-pointed stars.

As mentioned before, the 6-pointed star containing two pyramids is also an ancient sun worship symbol. It is an Adaptation of the pagan lotus or wheel symbol (Bloom et al., 1998).

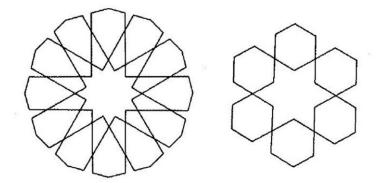


Figure 4.34: 12- and 6-rayed geometrical rosettes (Stronach & Young, 1966).

By the end of the tenth century at the latest, patterns containing 6- and 8-pointed rectilinear stars were fairly widespread, and it probably required little intellectual effort on the part of the original artists to conceive the idea of incorporating simple stars with greater numbers of points in repeating patterns. However, it is not until the second half of the eleventh century that examples survive in north western Iran (Stronach & Young, 1966).

The polygonal technique stands out as the most ubiquitous in the creation of traditional geometric patterns. This method makes use of an underlying polygonal matrix, or sub-grid, from which the pattern lines can be derived. This technique is the only method that allows for the creation of both simple geometric patterns and the most complex compound patterns. The polygonal technique has the further characteristic of allowing for the creation of all four principle families of Islamic geometric pattern regularly found throughout the Islamic world. In this way, four different families of pattern are derived from the polygonal sub-grid. These have been named acute, middle, obtuse and two-point. Figure 4.48 illustrates a well-used 5-fold polygonal sub-grid that can be traced back as far as the year 1000. This is the most widely used 5-fold sub-grid, and each of the four patterns this

polygonal sub-grid creates was well known historically; however, all the samples selected in this research belong to the acute and obtuse patterns.

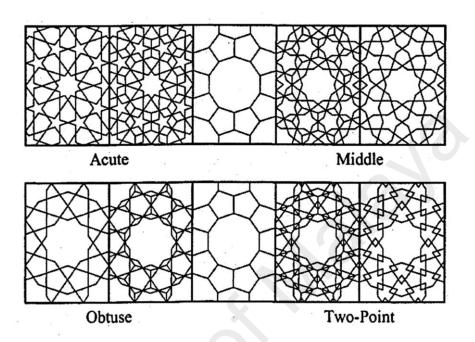


Figure 4.35: Most common 5-fold polygonal sub grid and the four pattern families this technique produced (Stronach & Young, 1966)

The number five may have been adopted for its meaning and symbolism in Islam: it may suggest either the five pillars of Islam – the profession of faith (*Shahadat*), daily prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and the pilgrimage to Mecca – or else the five main daily prayers. In the Sufi cosmological order, five represents nature in the macrocosm (sky, fire, air, water, and earth) and the five senses of human beings in the microcosm (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell).

The lines of the acute, middle and obtuse patterns all cross the edges of the underlying polygons at their mid-point, and the different character of each of these three designs is due to the change in the angle of these crossing pattern lines. In the acute geometric pattern, the angle of the crossing lines is  $36^{\circ}$ ; in the obtuse pattern the angle is  $108^{\circ}$ .

Patterns using 10-pointed stars occur in the wooden door of the cenotaph of *Imamzadeh Zein al Abedin* (Figure 4.49) and the Sultan Mohammad *Taher* Shrine in *Babol* (Figure 50). These "decagonal" patterns represent a departure from traditional methods of geometrical pattern design, although they inevitably result from a logical generalization of the principles developed so far.

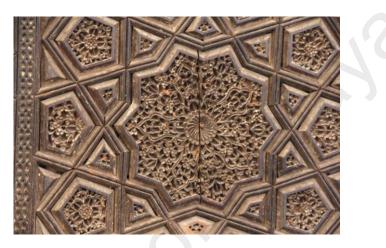


Figure 4.36: 10 pointed star, cenotaph of Imamzadeh Zein Al Abedin, Sari, Iran (Author)



Figure 4.37: 10 pointed star, wooden door leaves, Imamzadeh Sultan Mohammad Taher, Babol, Iran (Author)

Based on the interpretation of Muslims about geometry – the unifying intermediary between the material and the spiritual world (Syed Jan & Amer Shaker, 1995) – Nasr

(1987) notes that the octagon is a result of a rotated square, which represents the four elements of the universe (Water, Earth, Fire, Air) (Nasr, 1987).

Among the variety of the decagonal patterns mentioned earlier, the 10-rayed lotus with pentagons and five pointed stars (Figure 4.51), is one of the most widespread of all Islamic star patterns.

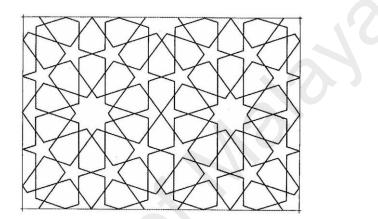


Figure 4.38: 10-rayed rosettes on a grid of 72°/108° rhombus (Stronach & Young, 1966)

The reason for using the number 10 in woodcarving is rooted in the Sufi religion. The great Sufis believed that there are 10 stages for the dead to reach God, which is the final stage to clear your soul. In addition, in the Quran, 10 is also an important number; verse 141 of the *Araf* chapter of the Quran mentioned 10 days of fasting by Moses to complete his greatness. Shapes with 10 rays also are the symbol of Sun and dates back to Mithraism.

# 4.4.3. Inscriptions

The written word has a sacred place in Islamic culture because the words of the Quran conveyed the divine message, and the written form of the Quran was considered to be the ultimate religious expression, the visual analogue for the divine message. It was in written form that the holy scriptures were preserved through the ages. The Arabic script was endowed with transcendent power because it was the vehicle that carried God's word; it

therefore became the symbol of Islamic belief and authority. Islamic culture employed the written word, not the image, as the herald of its faith; hence, its writing was formed into a unique combination of the verbal and the visual. Good writing is further enhanced by aesthetic values, which was the assumption that prompted Muslims to create writing with great visual appeal. The saying of the Prophet Muhammad that Allah, being beautiful himself, loves beauty, underscores the importance Islam attaches to the aesthetic perception of human beings (Siddiq, 1990)

The act of devotion implicit in copying the Holy Book is evident in the earliest manuscripts of the Quran, which date back to the  $8^{th}$  or  $9^{th}$  centuries. Even the uninitiated and the illiterate are impressed by the rhythm and flow of carefully-wrought calligraphy. Although both Kufic, the angular scrip, and *naskh*, the curve type, were known to exist in pre-Islamic times, early Muslim calligraphers chose the former, transforming it into a majestic style.

Inscriptions in a variety of forms became the most distinctive feature in the artistic vocabulary of objects produced during the Islamic era. The information provided by inscriptions can be extremely useful in reconstructing the types of patronage, as well as in identifying the names of the owners and the artists, and establishing the chronological sequence of artistic expression.

For most Iranian artists, writing has been a significantly influential medium to present their art and thoughts. In addition, aesthetically, it has been a medium to imply and express matters connected to the spirit and spiritual concepts.

The wooden objects of the Timurid period, like other artworks, are inscribed with religious and historical text. All the inscriptions are essentially in *thuluth* script. The designs of a master calligrapher display a sophisticated fluidity and elegance. Within the space allotted for the inscription, the relatively low baseline leaves a narrow space for the descending letters, such as *nun* ( $\omega$ ), waw ( $\omega$ ), or ya ( $\omega$ ), but ample space for the ascending vertical shafts of such letters as *alif* () and *lam* ( $\omega$ ).

The inscriptions are relatively sober, with elaboration restricted to only a few places. The vertical shafts of paired *lam- alifs* are occasionally knotted, and vertical letters often ascend to the upper edge of the band, then bend over as if constrained by the edge; at other times the wedge-shaped tips playfully extend a bit into the border band. The tails of such letters as '*ayn* ( $\mathcal{E}$ ) or *ya* ( $\mathcal{L}$ )' are sometimes bent back or knotted, while those of the final *nun* rise in sinuous curves. Most of these devices are attempts by the calligrapher to enliven the empty spaces left above and the low letters by the Arabic script.

The Quranic passages seem to have been chosen for use because of the parallel it offers to the shrine or mosque and places of God. Mostly, the inscriptions were invocations, like 'in the name of God the Merciful, the compassionate', and God's blessings on Muhammad and his family and complete blessings. In addition, the eloquent statement of God's dominion over heaven and earth, is one of the most popular in all Islamic epigraphy and is used in a great many situations.

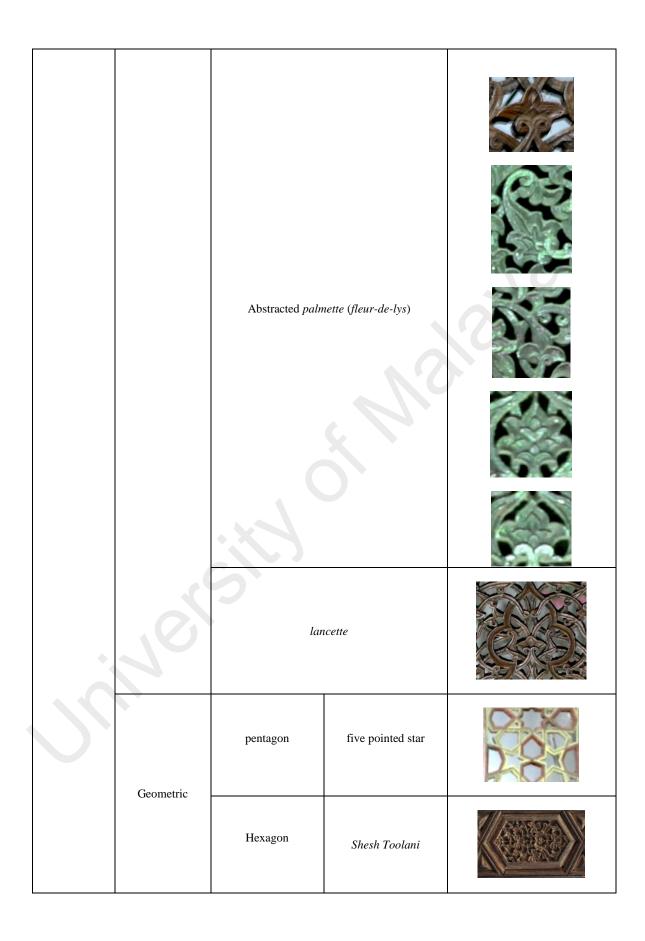
Calligraphic expression is often influenced by the social, religious, and spiritual message of the setting for which it is intended. For example, the inscription on the box of several shrines is on a plain and simple background and is devoid of any overwhelming decoration because it belongs to funerary architecture.

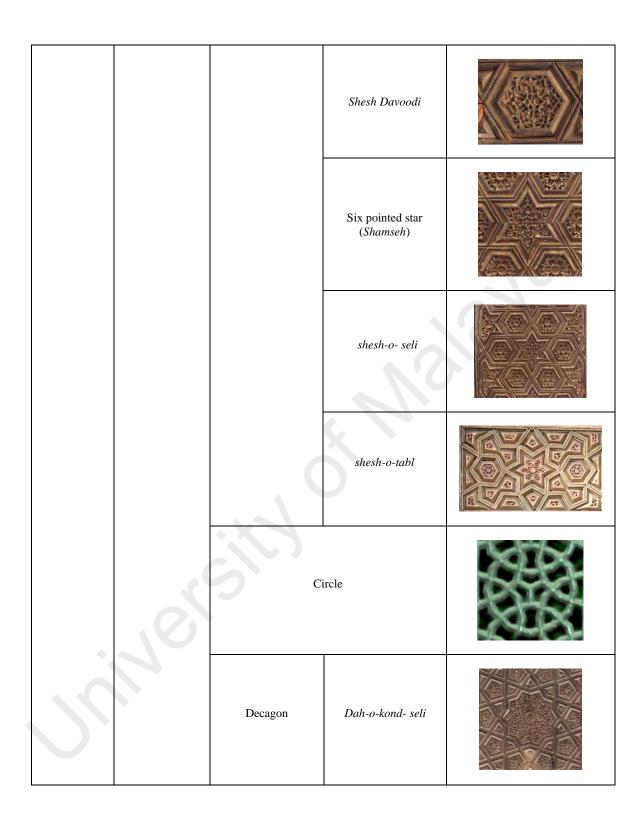
To get a better understanding, a chart is drawn to show the main trend of artisans or artists in the decoration of Timurid wooden objects.

# Type of motifs Name of motifs Images Scrolls (vine) Arabesque Guilloche Lotus Themes of Decoration three petal blossom Khatee Four petal blossom Trefoil

# TERMINOLOGICAL DECORATIVE ANALYSIS







			dah-o- tond	
		Octagon	eight pointed star (hasht-o- seli)	
		Thuluth	The name of craftsman	
			Date of manufacturing	
			The name of patron	10000000000000000000000000000000000000
•			Quranic texts	
S			Blessing script	
			Hadis	
			Shi`a pray	
	Figurative		-	-



# 4.5. Identification of motifs of Indian wooden objects

The Indian wooden works are decorated in two distinct techniques, carving and inlaid. In this technique, the pattern pieces are inlaid in a ground that remains visible. One such technique, involved the art of inlaying ivory, bone, and colour wood and stone in a distinct wood ground. In India, forms from nature have been carved in stone and wood for millennia. From Iran, came the taste for circuitous, interwoven arabesque spirals and the idealized natural world of Persian manuscript paintings.

## 4.5.2. Inlaid wooden box of Gujarat

Fine ivory inlaid furniture such as this represents an active export market from Mughal India to Europe from the late sixteenth century onward. While many Europeanizing elements are evident in the decoration of this box, the idiom is essentially a Mughal one. Such hunting scenes find their ultimate inspiration in Persian compositions, which, in turn, became popular in Mughal painting. The undulating branches of the bird-filled trees against which Portuguese hunters and animals have been set make this one of the most expressive pieces of its type (Figure 4.52).



Figure 4.39: Box, late 16th–early 17th century; Mughal, Indo-Portuguese style, *Gujurat*, India (Aruz et al., 2000–2001)

Muslim artists did not avail themselves of realism to capture nature, because everything – willed and engendered by God through his infinite and tireless acts of creation – has a fluidity of its own, a concept perfectly formulated by the arabesque with its own sense of rhythm, which cannot and should not be interrupted. Instead, they represented nature in its abstract from, in a sense, creating an archetypal vision that could be called timeless. This style may be among the most anonymous styles of ornamentation, but it could also be said that it characterizes Islamic artistic vision better than any other, and is its essential and fundamental substratum (Figure 4.53).



Figure 4.40: Box, arabesque and fauna Motifs, late 16th–early 17th century; Mughal, Indo-Portuguese style, Gujurat, India (Aruz et al., 2000–2001)

The artist represents animals and birds of the daily life, such as the deer, the eagle and the hawk, which are the every-day animals used for the hunt in the Islamic world. The artist is not satisfied just to represent these common animals as they are seen in nature, but he is also searching for the supreme. He depicted imaginary figurative, such as the battle between a lion and a bull or a lion and other animals that were influenced by pre-Islamic Iranian motifs. There are, however, representations of human figures also, which could be seen on the wood work of India. They are not symbolized and are depicting the reality.

#### 4.5.3. Flower style wooden casket

Carved caskets were another popular decorative object during the Mughal dynasty. Regarding the sample below, the main panel decoration is in high relief while the borders are incised and not so deeply cut as the rest of the decoration. The shapes have conventionalized and abstracted vegetal filling, which are filled with simple pointed, abstracted, trefoil leafs and buds springing from the stalk. The four sides filled with abstracted forms of *palmette* leaf (*fleur-de-lys*) start from a *palmette* flower. This form is represented with a conventionalized *trilobe* arranged in symmetrical order, originating from a single stem. All the stems are composed of six, above the eye level lotus flower. Each of these forms consists of a disk, six petals, and six three petals around the main petals (Figure 4.54).



**Figure 4.41:** Carved Sandal wood box in foliate, *khtaee* and arabesque motifs, India, fourth quarter of the 16th century, mortised and tenoned (blind dovetailed) (Author)

The back of the box is decorated with a *toranj* (medallion). This is a conventionalized form of the natural oval leaf. It still has the main vein from which radiate other smaller veins. The filler between the inner shape and the outer shape *toranj* frame is composed of four above the eye level lotus. Each of these forms consists of a disk and four petals. Around each panel, there are two borders that are decorated with two half acanthus (*palmette*) designs (Figure 4.55). The lush, intricately woven screen of the bas-relief foreshadows the dynastic taste for complexity and surface articulation that guided much of the later Mughal artistic production across the field of woodcarving.



Figure 4.42: carved Sandal wood box in foliate, *khtaee* and arabesque motifs, India, fourth quarter of the 16th century, mortised and tenoned (blind dovetailed) (Author)

# 4.5.4. Fragment of a box

The box fragment is one of the few objects of woodwork to have survived from the Mughal period in India, and undoubtedly owes its extraordinary state of preservation to the temperateness and aridity of India climate.

The design of the carved decoration consists of a panel that includes a central medallion and corner decoration or *Lachak-O-Toranj*. In each corner around 1/4 of the central medallion is repeated. A continuous border bears an interlaced vegetal scroll and carries a five-petal lotus. The central decorative motif consists of a smaller medallion inside and also a lotus in the centre of that. The empty spaces are filled with *palmette* motifs connected with double bent stems and split stems. Both sides of the inner medallion are covered with acanthus with elongated edges and *palmette* motifs. A lotus petal band runs along the box exterior stepped edges (Figure 4.56).



Figure 4.43: Fragment of a box, 17th century, India, carved, L. 4 3/4 in. (12.1 cm) W. 2 1/4 in. (5.7 cm), Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915, Metropolitan Museum of Arts (https://archive.org/details/mma\_fragment\_of\_a\_box\_448378)

The side of the box is like the top part decorated with one frame, and the *Lachak-O-Toranj* ornaments. They contain floral ornaments, full lotus presented in top view and small scale arabesques superimposed, lyre shape of *palmette* leaves, all executed meticulously and with great technical capacity (Figure 4.57).



Figure 4.44: Fragment of a box, 17th century, India, carved, L. 4 3/4 in. (12.1 cm) W. 2 1/4 in. (5.7 cm), Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915, Metropolitan Museum of Arts (https://archive.org/details/mma\_fragment\_of\_a\_box\_448380)

#### 4.5.5. Writing box

The writing box of Gujarat is one of the great examples of Indian wooden art as well as one of the finest specimens of inlaid wood that survived from the Mughal period.

The surfaces of this writing box are veneered with ebony and inlaid with ivory and *sadeli*, a micro mosaic technique. It is associated with the eastern Mediterranean region, from whence it spread to Iran and India. This technique consists of binding together sections of diverse materials (tin, wood, ivory, bone, etc.), which are sliced transversally and formed into thin sheets of repeating patterns that are adhered to a wooden support. An earlier method of mother-of-pearl inlaid into wood, in the sixteenth century destined primarily for the Turkish market, predates *sadeli* in western India; this box, however, resembles a later group, some of which were made for export to Europe (Figure 4.58).



Figure 4.45: Writing box, late 16th–early 17th century, India, Gujarat or Sindh, Wood with ivory and sadeli decoration (Aruz et al., 2000–2001)

The overall decorative scheme of the box closely relates to a wider Islamic taste. The board has three rectangular compartments and frames. The main compartment is bigger than the

two other compartments. The borders around the edges of the box contain scrolling vines bearing acanthus (half abstract *palmette*) with elongated edge, lotus, and *palmette* motifs in a contrasting and more fluid drawing style.

The central compartment, in between the two circle and polygon inlay radiates from a sixpointed star in the centre. The enclosed polygons are covered by sterilized full lotus blossoms presented in top view, and small-scale arabesques mainly of superimposed, lyre shaped pairs of lancet leaves, all executed meticulously and with great technical capacity.

The six-pointed stars that mark the spandrels of all the major gates and arches of the tomb is more complicated. The large size and prominence of the stars suggest that they are more than purely decorative. Some have argued that they are tantric symbols of the union of *Sakti* and *Siva* (Nath, 1975- 1976).

The two other compartments include the rhombus shape. Between the outer edge of the rhombus and the inner rectangular band, there are eight above the eye level, sterilized lotuses. The inside of the band is decorated with a line filling. There are conventionalized double folded leaves. The whole compartment is framed with two interwoven lines. The inside polygons are decorated with beads while the outside polygons are decorated with lines.

In contrast to the sides of the Iranian wooden door leaves, which are decorated with three carved rectangular panels, the writing box from Gujarat displays the complex interlacing characteristic of the Timurid door leaves, except that it is finer in scale and execution. The interlacing on the Timurid door leaves, rests on a primary framework, upon which a secondary pattern is applied; its stout lap-joint framing forms a great polygonal lotus. The

interstices of the interlacing are filled with a multitude of small panels, worked in inlaid, in a variety of shapes.

In contrast to the geometric decoration, the floral decoration was executed in the classic inlaid technique, component by component.

# 4.5.6. Wooden window

A window made out of carved wood, 18th Century, is another fine example of the mastery of the craft of the Mughal artisans. This window is supposedly a shutter, but even a humble shutter is given an elegant treatment of detailed woodcarving (Figure 4.59).



Figure 4.46: Fragment of a box, 17th century, India, carved, L. 4 3/4 in. (12.1 cm) W. 2 1/4 in. (5.7 cm), Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915, Metropolitan Museum of Arts (Azim, 2010)

The board has three compartments and frames. The main compartment is bigger than the two other compartments. The central compartment is decorated with the close-meshed pattern of interlacing palmette motifs. The upper compartment contains vine scroll ornaments, and small-scale arabesques, mainly of superimposed, lyre shaped pairs of lancet leaves (abstract palmette), all executed meticulously and with great technical capacity. The lush, intricately woven screen of the bas- relief foreshadows the dynastic taste for complexity and surface articulation that guided much of the later Mughal artistic production across the fields of wood carving. In the other compartment, the stem is composed of eight above the eye level lotus flower. Each of the main lotuses consists of a disk, and eight petals around the main petals. Both sides of the stem are decorated with *palmette* motifs. The continuous border bears an interlaced vegetal scroll and carries a six-petal lotus blossom. The top of the arch form window is completed with the *palmette* motif.

## 4.5.7. Wooden throne

For centuries, in India, persons of rank and stature were conveyed from place to place on a travelling couch known as a palanquin (covered or uncovered), held aloft by at least four bearers. The present elaborately carved wooden yet highly unusual piece shares both palanquin and throne-like qualities. Whilst the base section bears handles for carrying, in the style of a travelling bed, the upper section (also with carrying handles) is removable and comprises three steps leading to the seat with inscriptions carved around the inside of the back rest (Figure 4.60).

Few comparable examples exist to the present design of the throne; although a gilded wood palanquin in the Clive Collection at *Powis* Castle shares similar decorative motifs along the borders. The steps are a particularly rare feature, and can be viewed as symbolic, reflecting the ascendant stature of the throne's incumbent. A further throne comprising steps (made from wood with applied silver) is in *Knebworth* House, Hertfordshire (Archer, 1987).



Figure 4.47: Mughal carved wood throne with Quranic verses, India, probably Deccan, dated 1297 ah/1879-80 A.D, Islamic art Museum, Malaysia (Author)

The base is of rectangular form, and each corner has a clenched fist that forms the support surmounted by carved parrots, the sides are embellished with another running foliate scroll, an interlace of three sinuous lines of stalks and leaves. The base surface has four metal carrying handles, and the detachable throne is decorated throughout with carved openwork scrolling vines with large flower heads; there are six further carrying handles to the base, with remnants of paint and gilding throughout.

The continuous border bears an interlaced vegetal scroll and carrying acanthus leaves, *palmette*, lotus and rose flower.

The sides have conventionalized and abstracted vegetal filling. The decoration consists of abstracted, trefoil leaf; a bud springing from the stalk, abstracted forms of *palmette* leaf, lotus, and rose. The ornament consists of a scroll with grape leaves and a bunch of grapes (Figure 4.61).



Figure 4.48: The sides of wood throne decorated with abstracted, trefoil leaf; a bud springing from the stalk, abstracted forms of *palmette* leaf, lotus, and rose (Author)

Their axis-symmetric composition features similar coiling stems that widen to form leaves.

The seat with a low backrest is carved with inscriptions in Thuluth script (Figure 4.62).



Figure 4.49: The seat of throne with a low backrest decorated with inscriptions in Thuluth script (Author)

# 4.6. *Gurkanid* wooden art characteristics

*Gurkanid* (Mughal) wooden art is generally decorated in two distinct techniques, carving and inlay. Like the Timurid wooden objects, the door leaves, and several boxes and caskets maintain the traditional tripartite division in three rectangular panels: a larger vertical one sandwiched between smaller ones. Those on the main portal contain arched cartouches of

arabesque tracery and *palmettes* on a delicate scrolling ground. The spandrels are filled with an even finer naturalistic vegetal tracery of peonies, flowers, and leaves. The panels contrast with the framework of the valves, which is decorated with six-pointed stars, filled and bordered with delicate arabesques. Many of these motifs developed from earlier woodcarvings in pre-Islamic periods of Iran. Using the Tree of Life motif, symmetrical figures of birds, animals and humans, and also vine scrolls with *palmettes* are undeniable evidence of the influence of Sassanid art.

#### 4.6.2. The structure of design

The features of the *Gurkanid* carved wooden objects are deep, intricately carved floral designs inherited from the preceding pre-Islamic art. The favourite arabesque and *khataee* motifs are the central lotus, *palmettes*, split-leaf arabesques, scrolls, Tree of Life and small blossoms. The most popular figurative motifs are hunting scenes, lion and deer combat, birds and mythical beasts and human figures.

In general, the important principle of design in the Mughal wooden work, as in much Islamic art, is ambiguity. At a distance the apparent regularity of the carving and inlaid patterns and the relationship between the parts and the whole are obvious, but the individuality and brilliance of the panels are invisible, as the details blur into a textured surface. Close up, on the other hand, it is easy to become involved in the details of each individual panel and lose sight of the general composition. The sense of ambiguity can also be found in some of the smallest details, such as the carved panels in the groundless style, or in the reciprocal quality of some of the decorative patterns.

To complete the design of a *Gurkanid* wooden art, only a few kinds of natural motifs can be identified, while the rest have to be placed under the '*palmette*' section. The artist, of

necessity, uses *khataee* motifs in the work. Most of the decorations of the objects of this collection are a-natural, as is characteristic of Islamic decoration. The representation of flora was more conventional and formalized. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish formalized flower motifs from each other and so they are placed under title heads like, '3-petalled flower', '4-petalled flower', and '5-petalled flower'.

The selection of comparatively few natural forms from the luxuriant field of the botanical world was partly determined by the beauty of form and partly by the fact that they possess a symbolic meaning.

The plant motif comprises the climbing creeper, which probably identifies with either a vine or ivy stems with their leaves. However, formalized berries and grapes are often indistinguishable from one another. Moreover, the carving of foliage frequently ended up as *palmettes*. Another common plant is the cypress whose depiction is much conventionalized.

Among the foliage motifs, leaves of various plants and trees, such as vine, ivy, palm, acanthus leaves (*acanthus spinosus*) and lancet leaves are depicted in various ways with stems and tendrils or with the scroll. The style seems to be modified and altered by regional and cultural influences.

Figural motifs can be broadly categorized into three types: birds, animals, human figure. The categorization is based on their frequent occurrences within *Gurkanid* ornamentation.

The geometric motif refers to the motifs bearing geometrical form and simple shapes like squares, circles, and polygons. These shapes are used singularly or articulated in a particular 'repeat' order to create simple geometric patterns. Further, these geometric motifs (especially polygons) along with simple patterns are juxtaposed and repeated bearing complex mathematical rules to create primary or complex polygonal geometric patterns. Reviewing the motifs in *Gurkanid* ornamentation, it is apparent that carvers preferred figural and natural motifs rather than geometrical motifs. The geometrical designs never appeared in isolation but were always interspersed or juxtaposed with the two other kinds of motif (Thakkar, 2004).

# 4.7. Interpretation of motifs

The acceptance of ancient traditions into more recent artistic systems is a fact commonly observed in every culture during every period and does not represent an exception for the Indian peoples. It is now widely accepted that Islamic art was very receptive towards external influences, exactly as it exerted its own on the neighbouring cultures. However, the elements borrowed from Iranian tradition were also very influential on Indian art in the Mughal period.

#### 4.7.2. Arabesque motifs

In recognition of the most important fact, Islam is a religion going back towards the beginning, and this return shows the restoration of all things into Unity. This concept is captured in the most stylized form in the form of an arabesque. It represents a perfect transcription of the laws of rhythm into visual terms. Its unfolding is continuous, like a wave, with contrasting phases having various degrees of resonance. The design does not need to be symmetrical, but, to make up for this; it always has certain repetitions, whose rhythmic character is accentuated by the fact that the sounds and the silences are aesthetically equivalent (Burckhardt, 2009 ).

The actual vegetal elements of the arabesque used in Indian wooden objects decoration were drawn from *Sasanian* art (Figure 4.63). They mostly include vine scrolls and abstract forms usually known as the *palmette* (Figure 4.64).



Figure 4.50: Plate with pair of ibex and tree or vine, Iran, *Sasanian* period, 6th-7th century AD, silver and gilt - Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Atil, 1981)



Figure 4.51: Box, late 16th–early 17th century; Mughal, Indo-Portuguese style, *Gujurat*, India (Aruz et al., 2000–2001)

The origins of biomorphic patterns go back to an era of agricultural worship. Agricultural worship was born in the time of nomad settlements and was based on the idea of fertility. The fertility of nature and soil was widely praised and the emerging crops had become a symbol of life. Apart from sprouts there are other elements representing agricultural symbolism: water, nourishing seeded fields, and sky – the source of water, and sun, warming everything. These three elements of fertility were represented in art by wavy lines and circles. Later, wavy lines gave way to Arabesque patterns decorated with leaves and

flowers. Circles as solar signs representing the idea of moving – the sun travels in the sky each day and changes its way during the year – were enriched with radiuses to look like spinning wheels. These spinning wheels later developed into lotus flowers. The Tree of Life represented the idea of an earth and heaven connection and the idea of fertility at the same time.

Titus Burckhardt in the book of 'Art of Islam Language and meaning' points out the connection of Arabesque patterns to zoomorphic art of Scythians and *Sarmatians*. Hunting worship of nomads preceded agricultural worship and was represented by animal depictions – usually it was bronze and iron animals turned to a spiral or double spiral. The continuous spiral of animals in pursuit could give rise to a plant like composition, and it is here that we are brought back to the history of arabesque (Burckhardt et al., 2009).

#### 4.7.3. *Khataee* motifs

*Khataee* motifs are one of the ideal motifs for ornamentation purposes and as fillers, as they are easy to stencil and carve.

The lotus (*padma* or *paduma*) is the most common flower motif in Indian wood work ornamentation (Figure 4.65). It is shown in the form of a bud (*padmakosa*), half lotus (*ardhapadma*), upturned lotus (*urdhvapadma*) and a fully blown lotus (*purnapadma*). It is carved either singularly to form a lotus band (*padma pattika*) or with leaves and foliage.



Figure 4.52: Fragment of a box decorated with lotus motif, 17th century, India, Theodore M. Davis Collection, Bequest of Theodore M. Davis, 1915, Metropolitan Museum of Arts (https://archive.org/details/mma\_fragment\_of\_a\_box\_448378)

The growth of the lotus from water is a symbol of primeval stormy waters, and its beauty and order is the symbol of the order and beauty of the manifestation of the creator in the universe (*Camus*), and its opening and closing with light is the manifestation of light and the goddess of the sky that it is unique in all primitive civilizations.

Therefore, in Hinduism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, and the Mesopotamian region, as well as the Egyptian and also Hermosa religions, the goddess of the creator of this universe grew from the lotus like *Brahma*, *Shiva*, *Mitra*, *Anahita*, *Amun* and *Amaunet*. Hence, in these religions, the lotus symbolizes nature's secret reflectivity in the eastern traditionalist human mind.

The lotus (*Padma* in Sanskrit) was worshipped in some parts of Asia with its holy aspects originating from water in the beginning. Since water was the symbol of an old ocean that the universe was created from it, the lotus on the water was considered as its womb and the blossoming petals represent the god of creation in Egyptian and Indian myths and art.

Growing from water, and opening at sunrise and closing at sunset, and the appearance of the moon are the fundamental concepts of creation in the oriental religions that symbolize light, water and appearance. Therefore, it is the only manifestation of narration between the creator and creatures in the Hindu, Islam and Zoroastrian religions that are seen in the myths of the lotus, and *Anahita* and *Mitra* in the Indo-Iranian myths, and, particularly, Buddhism, since Buddha considers himself as a lotus that has arisen from the contaminated mud but is purified. (BolkhariGhahi, 2005).

In Buddhist temples, the lotus is located in the middle of decorated ceilings in Central Asia. The octagonal drawing of the pagoda relates to the lotus. The sculpture of the sitting Buddha on the lotus is shown as a symbol of the ruler of the universe (Hall & Puleston, 1996). The lotus is also one of the important flowers found in Indian art, symbolizing longevity, curative powers, summer, fertility, beauty and delicacy.

In the Hindu Dharma, it is a symbol of purity and detachment. It is a symbol of vegetation and prosperity; born out of watery mud and unfolding itself into a beautiful flower symbolizes the origin of the Universe. It also symbolizes that one can raise oneself from evil to purity.

We can say that the lotus flowers under the foot of *Anahita* in *Tag-e-bostan* is a product of the interaction between Sassanid and Buddhism, particularly in the *Bamiyan* region that led to the creation of Iranian and Buddhism art in *Hakin* belief (Figure 4.66).



**Figure 4.53:** Half lotus under the feet of *Anahita*, an Interaction between *Sasanian* beliefs and Buddhism, *Shapur* II investiture at *Taq-e Bustan* (Author)

The lotus is rooted in Egyptian art. In the *Hermopolis* creation myth, "*Ra*" the famous god of the Egyptians was born from a lotus flower that arose from the waters. In this myth, the lotus flower was unified with the sun, and since the lotus opens in the morning and closes at night, it refers to the relationship with the sun god sitting on its petals. In some myths, this god was considered as a creator of human beings and *Nephertum* was shown as a man with a lotus turban in the Egyptian sculpture and Ra was drawn smelling lotus.

There is a powerful relationship between the lotus and fertility not only in myths but also in the life of the Egyptians. *Staldman*, in an article on huge masterpiece engineering, writes that the Egyptians registered their accounts using the lotus: sediment was aggregated by flooding of the Nile along the coast, and, as a result, marking was necessary in the agriculture lands, so they could progress in calculation and mathematics and registered the length of flooding by the help of the lotus (Tansev et al., 1995).

If we consider the oldness of the Egyptian and Assyrian works compared to the architecture of Persepolis and importance of the lotus in the thoughts of the Egyptians, just like the Iranians and Indians, and pay attention to the narratives of Darius concerning the employment of Egyptian sculptors, we should accept that lotus designs were imported from Egypt into Iran and India.

## 4.7.4. Figurative motifs

Lions are 'native' to India today, but their arrival into India is clouded in conjecture. As we have seen, one premise that converts the provenance of the Indian lion from its mythological foundations into historical reality is the presence of game parks and hunting reserves throughout its former range, where the animal was enclosed, bred and stocked to be hunted and as material for diplomatic tribute and spectacle. Persian, Greek and Assyrian accounts all suggest that these animals were subsequently exported or found their way through trade and diplomatic channels into new ranges. This could be how the Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo persica*) arrived in India; 'naturalized' over time as the centuries passed, the lion was accepted as an organic, 'native' species of the country. Certainly, this holds more water than the theories of the Indus drying up, allowing the lion to cross over from Persia during periods of drought.

Hindu, or, more properly, Vedic religious thought, was more active in the Persian-*Soghdian* region at a particular period and may have been very familiar with the lion, before the lion familiarized itself with India. Likewise, Vedic literature, with its wide geographical and cultural ranges, played its own part in bringing the lion into the Indian cultural mainstream. This accounts for the presence of lions in India's cultural space despite the lack of physical evidence of the animal within India's geographical boundaries (Lowry, 1987).

As deputy of *Ahura Mazda* on the earth, *Darius* had to abolish the division of time into two realms and contented that he effectively ruled both. The degree of his concern in this respect is measured by the number of Lion-Bull icons that were incorporated in the

Persepolis visual propaganda program. The lion represented the sun and the bull symbolized the moon, and the whole reflected the day and night revolutions (Figure 4.67) (Ghehi, 2010).



Figure 4.54: Lion and bull in combat: limestone frieze, the stairway facade of w stairway, Persepolis, Palace of Darius, Iran, ca. 358-338 BCE. (Author)

On the other hand, drawing the hunting scene was the most popular decoration in the Sassanid period and may have transferred to India with the entrance of the Portuguese.

*Taqwasân* or *Taq-e Bostan* is a series of large rock reliefs from the era of the Sassanid Empire of Persia (226 to 650 AD). The carvings, some of the finest and best-preserved examples of Persian sculpture under the *Sassanids*, were made on two arches. On the right wall of the arch, there is a picture of the king's hunting measuring  $3.8 \times 5.7$  meters. From the time of Cyrus the Great to the end of Sassanid period, hunting was one of the favourite hobbies of Iranian kings. Therefore, scenes of hunting are frequently found next to those of crowning. The scene in a side of the Ivan shows the king stalking deer. Five elephants flush out the fleeing boars from a marshy lake for the king who stands poised with bow and arrow in hand while being serenaded by female musicians. These royal hunting scenes are among the most vivid and highly narrative murals immortalized in stone (Figure 4.68).



Figure 4.55: *Taq-e-Bostan*, Persian rock reliefs near *Kermanshah*, *Sassanid* Empire (591-628) BC depicting royal hunting scenes of boar and wild deer (Author)

## 4.7.5. Geometric motifs

In Hinduism, there are geometric figures called *Yantra* and Mandalas that express divine order. Hindus believe that certain geometric figures correspond to the symmetry of the cosmic inner world. Each *Yantra* is supposed to invoke the special attributes of the deity it is associated with, e.g. *Sri Yantra* and *Kuber Yantra*.

Several shapes and patterns commonly employed in *Yantra* include the lotus flower, which typically represents chakras, with each petal representing a psychic propensity associated with that chakra; and the *Shatkona* or six-pointed star, which represents the union of both the male and feminine form. More specifically it is supposed to represent *Purusha* (the Supreme Being), and *Prakriti* (Mother Nature, or causal matter). Often this is represented as Shiva/Shakti. Generally, Shiva is the upward pointed triangle and Shakti the downward pointed triangle.

*Sri Yantra* also known as *Sri Chakra* is the most important of the *Yantras* (Figure 4.69). The most famous form of the *Sri Chakra* is its three-dimensional form, which is sometimes made in metal. In this way, *Sri Chakra* is said to represent Mount *Meru*, the cosmic mountain at the centre of the universe. *Sri Chakra* is the main *Yantra* of the Goddess and all aspects of her worship can be performed through it. It can also be used to worship Shiva (Frawley, 1996) (Busenbark, 1949).



Figure 4.56: Sri Yantra in Tantra, (http://true-color-of-mind.blogspot.com/2011/09/sri-vidya-or-sri-yantra-in-tantra.html)

*Akbar*, the Mughal emperor also chose a six-pointed star as a convenient symbol for *Humayun*, in particular, and the Mughals, in general. Even though six-pointed stars appear on many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century monuments, both in India and elsewhere in the Muslim world, it is only under the Mughals that they are consistently used as isolated motifs invariably placed on, or near, entrances to buildings. Most probably, this motif is rooted in *Sasanian* and transferred to India during the Mughal dynasty (Figure 4.70) (Shokoohy, 1994).



Figure 4.57: Persian, Sasanian Empire, Khusro Parvez, 591-628 AD, Silver AR Drachm, year 23, Stakhr (Persepolis). Weight: 3.56 grams (Compareti, 2007)

## 4.7.6. Inscription

The writing is one of the most useful and effective arts of cultural expression. This was of course realized even in ancient civilizations, the three most important of which – the Indus, Mesopotamia, and the Nile – developed their own writing systems, specimens of which still exist in inscriptions on stone, metal plaques, and baked clay. Bengal, which lies in the eastern part of the South Asian subcontinent, also has a rich epigraphic heritage that goes back centuries, even though, all the calligraphic styles in the Islamic period originated outside the South Asian subcontinent.

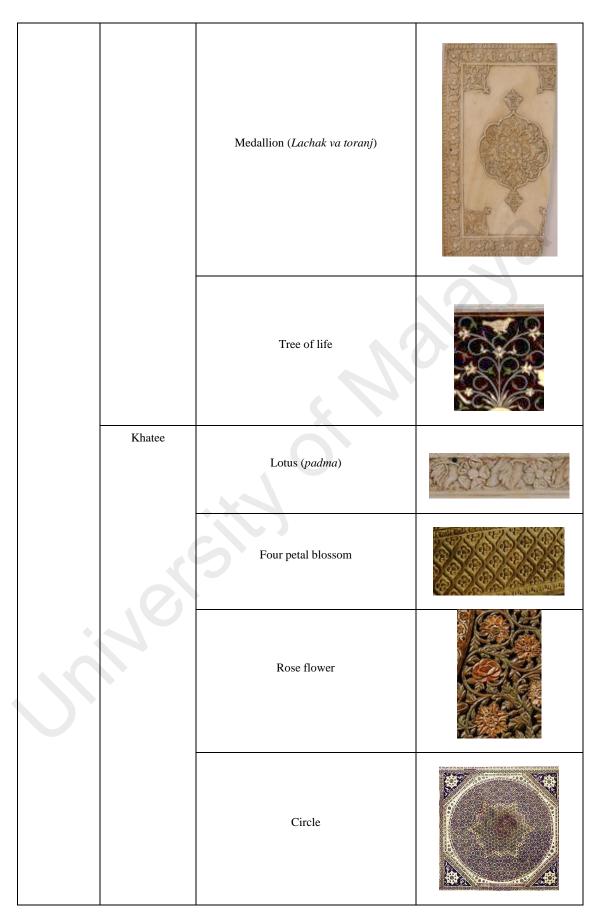
The Indian calligraphers were also aware of the unlimited scope and freedom that the Arabic script could provide, and they freely used their imagination and ideas to create new designs and forms in calligraphy.

With the advent of the Mughals, however, the cultural development assumed a new dimension under a more centralized administration. The Mughals were greatly influenced by the Iranian culture, and invited many Persian artists and calligraphers to the royal court. As a result, *nasta'liq*, Persia's new and popular calligraphy style, found its way into India and soon emerged as the dominant style of the whole region (Siddiq, 1990).

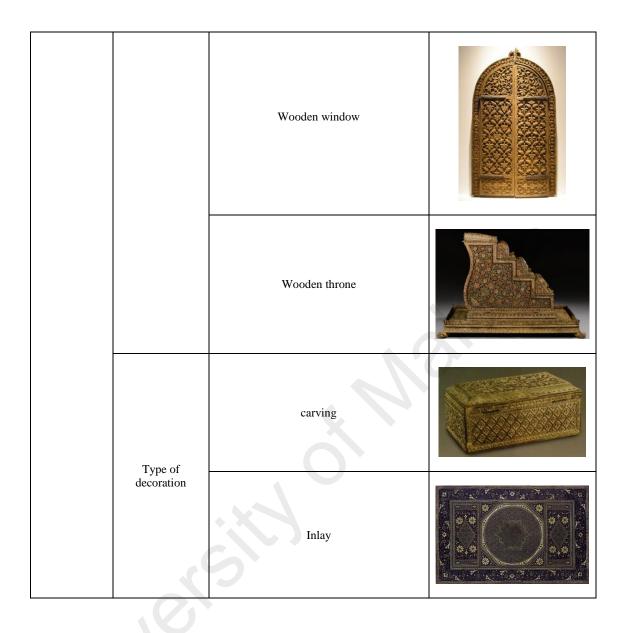
To get a better understanding of the motifs in wood work of India in the Mughal era, a chart is provided to show the main trend of artisans or artists in the decoration of wooden objects.

-	Name of motifs	Type of motifs	Images
		Abstracted <i>palmette</i> (fleur-de-lys)	AL. A.
	Arabesque		
Themes of Decoration		Abstracted half palmette (chang e eslimi sadeh)	
	10,		
5		Acanthus (chang e dahan ajdari)	

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		Hexagon	six pointed star (shatkona)	
	Figurative	Human	hunting scene	
		Animal	deer, lion, elephant	
		Birds		
		W	Vooden box	



#### 4.8. Discussion

The end of the fourteenth century brought new political and military power in Transoxania cantered at Samarkand, in the Timurid state. The Timurid culture developed an Iranian characteristic. The cultural activity of the Timurid dynasty actually started after *Timur*`s death. His successors adopted the Persian way of life and devoted their time to reconstructing the ruins and establishing cultural centres. It is true that the invasion by the Mughal also brought about visible changes in the cultural life style of the Indian people, which, in turn, brought about changes in the art, including wooden art.

In this study, it is understood that the design details used in both Iranian and Indian wooden objects are similar, or at least adopt the same principles and procedures. A wide range of similar icons and symbols are used in the woodwork of both countries to express various concepts. The similarity in style between examples of carved wood from such widely separated regions as Iran and India are a historical fact of primary importance, implying a relationship between the two and thus showing that woodwork reflected the styles and ideas of more than local origin.

We have noted that despite trying to refuse the pre-Islamic motifs after Islam, there are still many motifs like vine scrolls, lotus blossom, *palmette*, cypress tree, and guilloche, etc. that belonged to the Sassanid or even pre Sassanid dynasties.

As the results show, the main biomorphic motifs that were inherited by both countries artists from great pre-Islamic artistic traditions can be roughly divided into three groups: Tree of Life, arabesque and lotus. The Tree of Life is a depiction of a plant with a clear origin, sometimes with fruits and flowers on branches. The arabesque pattern is a wavy line, often called a 'vine', with stylized leaves often turned to spiral, sometimes with flowers, and buds. The lotus flower is a depiction of a stylized flower, initially in full blossom. All these vegetal forms are placed besides a contrasting background so that they interlace over and under to give emphasis to the foreground. These forms are not the replica of natural foliage because Islam disregards the usage of figural representations.

Contemplation on artistic works in the oriental civilization of Iran and India suggests the broad importance of the lotus in these civilizations. These findings indicate the effect of civilizations on each other. We can say that the lotus flowers under the foot of *Anahita* in *Tag-e-Bostan* are the product of the interaction between the *Sassanids* and Buddhists. The similarity among civilizations in the usage of the lotus in artistic works emphasizes its symbolic and spiritual status relating to concepts like manifestations of creatures and life.

These motifs seem to be an Indian version of Persian motifs like the battle of the lion and bull, cypress, symmetrical birds, and probably six-pointed star. There are a substantial, through gradual stylistic change among the centuries that are attributed to Indian pre-Islamic art, which is best exemplified by their figural decoration. In addition, the diminution in the scale of the figural representation may be viewed as a general trend during this era in India.

Based on the wooden objects remaining from the Timurid dynasty, the Timurid motifs at the beginning of the period were a continuation of the styles created by the *Il-Khanids*. The change occurred slowly, but finally became obvious.

The decorative vocabulary of Timurid woodwork does include a wide variety of vegetal, abstract, and geometric ornaments, of which many are well known in earlier Iranian woodwork; these include lotus blossoms, trefoil calyx, *palmettes*, floral and leaf arabesques, scrollwork, and guilloche bands. Inscription also plays an important role within

the decorative scheme. The typical valve has three rectangular fields: a larger vertical panel in the centre with smaller horizontal panels often inscribed above and below.

The inscriptions of Timurid woodwork serve a dual function in that they provide a means of both communication and decoration. Among the inscription of these century wares the most common type of cursive script is one that is generally identified as *thuluth*.

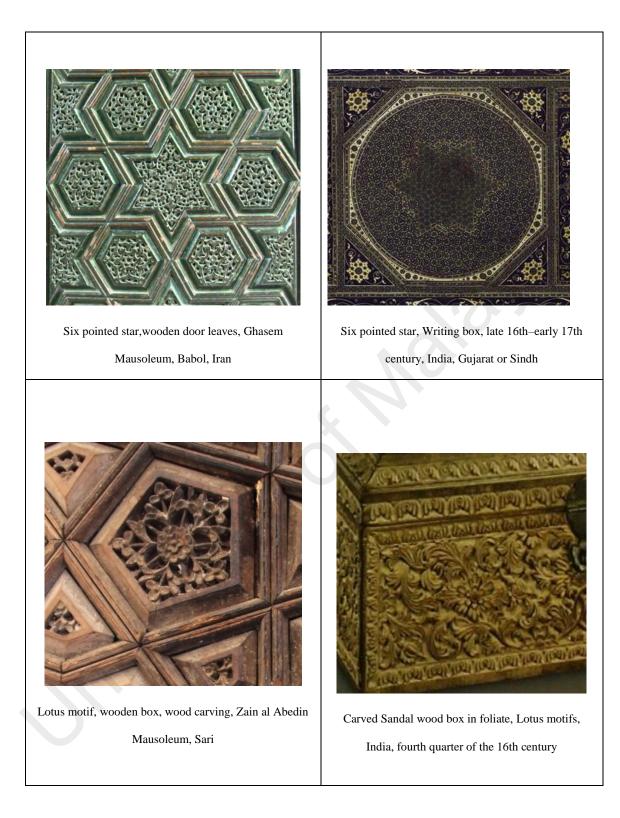
In comparison to the Mughal period in India, more wooden evidence was available for the Timurid era in Iran. In addition, there are not many reported in the memories of foreign embassies or the traveller's accounts remaining from that period. There is no evidence to represent the style of wooden work before the Mughal invasion in India to help us in the reconstruction of Islamic wooden art. Based upon strong stylistic and formal parallels between Central and Eastern Islamic lands we can suggest that the style of wooden work decorations had a critical effect upon the revival and subsequent evolution of Indian luxury wooden work.

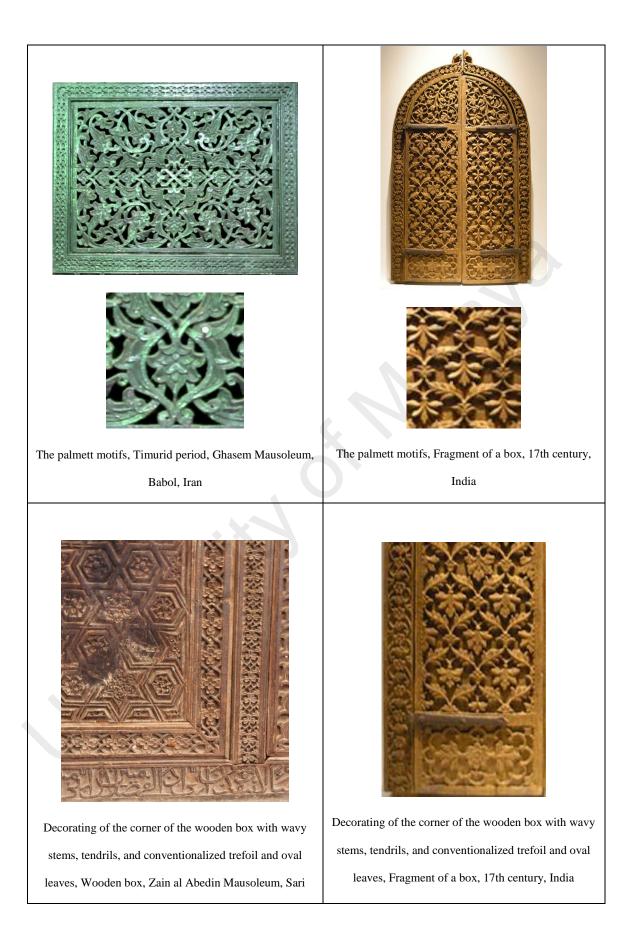
The decorative art of *Gurkanid* wooden work includes a wide variety of vegetal, abstract, geometric, and figural ornaments; these include lotus blossoms, trefoil calyx, *palmettes*, floral and leaf arabesques, scrollwork and battle scenes. Inscriptions also play an important role within the decorative scheme. In India, in contrast to Iran, most of the inscriptions are in the Persian language and written as Persian poems. However, a considerable amounts of the content inscribed on Timurid wooden doors have as yet to be linked to the Quran.

The wooden art of the *Gurkanids* is displayed in its use of symbolism and harmonious design, all visual images of the faith are rendered on objects in daily use. Then it reflected the moral standards of Muslim society and its profound involvement with the divine representation of the physical world. The primary concern of the artists seemed to be in

producing an object invested with an intrinsic message that could be interpreted on several levels. The simplest level was the appreciation of the technical and aesthetic qualities of the pieces. They were beautifully designed and executed and contained recognizable themes that were meaningful to patrons. Some themes and symbols bestowed blessings and good wishes with protective talismans. These very elements also allowed themselves to be interpreted in a more sophisticated manner among scholarly societies; they represented the omnipotence of the universe, its order, harmony and beauty.









Decorating of the borders of the wooden door leaves with wavy stems, tendrils, and conventionalized trefoil, Timurid period, Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Mazandaran



Decorating of the borders of the wooden throne with wavy stems, tendrils, and conventionalized trefoil, Mughal carved wood throne, India, Deccan, 1879-80 A.D



Arabesque vine scroll motifs decorated with palmette, Transom window, Timurid period, Imamzadeh Abbas, Sari, Mazandaran



Arabesque vine scroll motifs decorated with palmette,

Fragment of a box, 17th century, India

### CHAPTER 5

### 5. CONCLUSION

Although scholarly literature briefly referred to the wooden arts of the Mughal period, the information presented was limited in scope. The main reason for this forgetfulness might be the limitations that existed concerning the available sources for the data, and the limited amount of wood work that has been preserved from the Mughal period. In as much as the innovative features that characterized Mughal wooden art and ornamentation had not previously been identified and defined, finding the complete historical background of wooden objects belonging to the Mughal period was a major challenge.

The purpose in this research was to study the motifs of the Mughal era through the Iranian and Indian history. The primary source used in the study was the literature pertaining to all the pre-existing wooden art traditions in Iran and all the Islamic lands were reviewed in order to ascertain the extent to which the Mughal material stands apart as a phenomenon of specific time and place. In selecting the best results to study, eleven wooden samples from Iran and India belonging to the Mughal dynasty were chosen to depict the motifs of Mughal wooden art.

The methodology used for the current study was Visual semiotic, and the iconology and iconography of Erwin Panofsky, which included three levels: in the first level, the motifs of wooden objects were identified and their category determined as arabesque, *khataee*, calligraphy, geometric, and figurative motifs. In the next level, the connection between the motifs and the culture of their country of origin was found. In the last level after identifying the motifs, the symbolic meanings and the importance of these motifs in the selected countries were explored.

Although the principle ideas behind the wooden motifs in both countries were the same, the details and the way the motifs were displayed changed. Regarding the evidence, both Indian and Iranian Mughal artists used the same carving technique and the same basic arabesque and *khataee* motifs. The most surprising thing is that most of the motifs described in the wood work of Iran and India go back to the representational types that evolved in the pre-Islamic period of Persia. Although there is a gap of one thousand years between these ancient motifs and the motifs we have discussed in the Indian wood work motifs, the connection between them is evident.

As the results show, the important element of both countries is the unity of Islamic art. It has a recognizable aesthetic signature that somehow manages to express itself across an entire range of productions. The 'language' of this art, once established, was readily assimilated by each of the different nations and ethnicities that were brought within the Islamic sphere. It was both assimilated and built upon, because, every region, in every period, produced its own version of this super-national style.

This extraordinary consistency of styles and artistic preferences in the Islamic world clearly derive from a deeper, social consistency. All Muslims hold to the same basic system of belief, all are familiar with the customary religious observations, and all – despite national and ethnic differences and rivalries – felt themselves to be Muslim first and foremost. This strong sense of identity and continuity tended towards a high degree of social and artistic conservatism. As a result, many forms and artistic concepts of wooden art remained unchanged over the centuries.

However, during the formative years of Islamic art, artists relied upon existing traditions and supplied patrons with objects decorated with familiar themes. The harmony of the universe and its perpetual life and movement are represented by delicately entwined floral scrolls bearing naturalistic and fantastic blossoms. These scrolls extend beyond the physical boundaries of the units and are frequently superimposed, creating a feeling of endless space and depth. The extension of the design beyond the physical boundaries of the object suggests that we are dealing with the same concept found in radiating designs; that is, the visual representation of the harmony and order of the universe, its intricate and infinite existence.

The main similarity between the wooden arts of both countries, is the art of decoration – which is to say, of transformation. The aim, however, is never merely to ornament, but rather to transfigure. Biomorphic decoration, geometric patterns and calligraphy became the main ways of surface decoration. Essentially, this is a reflection of the Islamic preoccupation with the transitory nature of being. Substantial structures and objects are made to appear less substantial, and materials are de-materialized. Vegetal patterns in Islamic art started to represent earthly Paradise. The decorated leaves of doors, windows, and boxes can become windows onto the infinite. The spiritual influences of the faith on the artist led him to form an acceptable style for his time. To fulfil that aim the artist looked through the window of nature; picked his motifs, and purified and conventionalized them. His capability and the great demand of the uprising ramified artistic movement led to a rich enormous vocabulary of decoration.

From another point of view, the main characteristics of these patterns are that they strictly balance the design and the ground. In this way, the lines always flow back on themselves; hence, ones attention never stops at any one element and the eye continues to move. This vision is then transformed into a rhythmic experience accompanied by intellectual satisfaction. Islamic art assimilates the archaic motifs by reducing them into more abstract

general formulae. In this way, it levels them out, and, in doing so, it takes away all the materialistic approach, and gives it a magical quality along with the spiritual experience.

From a purely doctrinal point of view, these designs create an aura of spirituality without offending the delicate concept of non-idolism practiced in Islam. In addition, the purity and orderliness of patterns and symmetries could evoke a sense of transcendent beauty, which, at best, would free and stimulate the intellect.

The main difference between the Iranian and Indian decorative art on wooden objects was the usage of figurative motifs. One of the decisive factors that dictated the nature of Muslim art is the religious rule that forbids the use of human or animal forms. One of the authentic sayings of Prophet Mohammed narrated by *Ibn Umar* reported that Allah's Messenger said:

"Those who paint pictures will be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it will be said to them: Breathe soul into what you have created".

These concepts came from the concerns of idolism previously practiced in the Arab society. However, this forbidden rule could not stop the strong background of India in figurative art and they continue to decorate their objects with magnificent figurative motifs.

This study has not only provided a more complete understanding of Mughal wooden work motifs in Iran and India and its place within the overall history of Iranian and Indian wooden work, but may also in some way contribute to the future investigation of other comparative studies of the decorative arts like specific area of Iran and India or artefacts have been made in specific period of time.

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## SUPPLEMENTARY

## List of publication

## Journal papers

- 1. Kakouei, M., Kakouei, M., Suberamanian, K. 2013. The history, technology and treatment of painted silk Folding Screen belonging to Palace-Museum of Golestan in Iran, *Journal of Fibers & textiles in Eastern Europe* (ISI- Cited Publication).
- 2. Pirzad, A., Kakouei, M., Suberamanian, K., 2014. Saqa-Nefars: A historical timber structure in vernacular architecture of Iran, *METU Journal of Faculty of architecture*. (ISI- Cited Publication)

## Conference papers

- Mahshid Kakouei, Mina Kakouei, Kumaran Suberamanian, Sabzali Musa Kahn, Afshin Jahangirzadeh, 2012. Masouleh, A city, A history, International Conference on Architectural, Civil and Environmental Engineering. November 2012, Paris (Scopus-cited Publication).
- Kakouei, M., Suberamanian, K., Musa Kahn, S., Kakouei, M., Preservation of Historical Zelkova Carpinifolia Wooden Structure in Humid Weather, International Conference on Earth Sciences and Engineering, 12- 13 Jun 2014, Copenhagen, Denmark. (Scopus, ISI- cited Publication)