

**THE PHOENIX MOTIF DURING THE DECLINE OF THE  
SASSANID EMPIRE (600-700AD)**

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**CULTURAL CENTRE  
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA  
KUALA LUMPUR**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The current research investigates the Sassanid phoenix that had been created during ancient time in Persia (Iran). Sassanid dynasty is the last Persian Empire before the emergence of Islam in the country. This research examines the Sassanid phoenix which is an imaginative hybrid creature that looks like a winged mammal. Historians and Iranian studies scholars suggest that the body parts of this creature comprise of the dog, lion, eagle and peacock. These animals are part of the Sassanid phoenix and were considered sacred and some had cultural value during the ancient times. So, the current research examines the iconic value of each part of this creature according to Erwin Panofsky's theory about iconography and iconology in three steps, which include, formal art analysis, studying the subject matter, investigating cultural and religious values related to the subject matter. Then, the researcher selected five samples of Sassanid phoenix motifs. Firstly a formal analysis of each composite part of the phoenix (head, wings, claws, and tail) is carried out. Then the significance of each composite part is examined within the historical context of the Sassanid Empire and its neighboring countries, by referencing historical books, sacred texts and literature.

## ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini mengkaji *phoenix* yang telah dicipta semasa kejatuhan empayar Sassanid, pada zaman purba di Parsi (Iran). Dinasti Sassanid adalah Empayar Parsi terakhir sebelum muncul Islam di negara tersebut. Kajian ini menjelaskan bahawa *phoenix* yang menjadi perlambangan empayar Sassanid adalah makhluk hibrid imaginatif yang kelihatan seperti mamalia bersayap. Dalam kalangan ahli sejarah dan pengkaji Iran sepakat menyatakan bahawa bahagian-bahagian badan makhluk ini terdiri daripada anjing, singa, helang dan burung merak. Haiwan-haiwan ini dianggap suci dan mempunyai nilai budaya pada zaman purba. Oleh itu, penyelidikan ini mengkaji nilai ikonik bagi setiap bahagian makhluk ini mengikut teori Erwin Panofsky mengenai ikonografi dan ikonologi yang merangkumi tiga langkah, termasuk analisis seni secara formal, mengkaji perkara pokok yang berkaitan dan menyelidik bahan analisis berdasarkan kefahaman nilai budaya dan agama. Di sini, pengkaji telah memilih lima sampel motif *phoenix* Sassanid. Pertama, analisis formal bagi setiap bahagian komposit *phoenix* (kepala, sayap, kuku, dan ekor). Kemudian kepentingan setiap bahagian komposit telah diteliti di dalam konteks sejarah empayar Parsi dan negara-negara jirannya, dengan rujukan buku-buku sejarah, kitab-kitab suci dan penulisan sastera.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Overview**

This research investigates the body parts of Sassanid phoenix which seems to be an imaginative hybrid creature. As historians suggest, Sassanid phoenix is a combination of different animals and birds such as a dog, eagle, lion and peacock. Sassanid dynasty was the last Persian Empire before emerging Islam in Iran and they had been ruling during 2nd to the 6<sup>th</sup> century in Persia (Iran).

So, this thesis examines each part of Sassanid phoenix body (iconography) to find out the symbolic and cultural meanings of them as well as to understand the possibility of any influences from neighboring cultures on Sassanid phoenix or it is an original icon of ancient Persia.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Ancient Persians, like other ancient civilizations, believed sacredness and cultural significance of some social elements and creatures in their daily life have a significant effect on their ideology.

Sassanid phoenix is one of those creatures that archeologists suggest that, it is a hybrid creature as a result of several animals' combination. After studying separately and explaining each part of Sassanid phoenix, it seems each of the body parts belongs to different animals and birds that separately has a symbolic significance on this motif. It will be possible to explain about their symbolic values impact on each other and the reason to create a new symbol with a new function in this research.

A significant point here is that, there is no research about Sassanid phoenix which investigates on the cultural and symbolic implication of each body parts of Sassanid phoenix to understand about details of it as a collection of several symbolic creatures.

### **1.3 Aim of the Study**

The aim of the current research is to discover the meaning of phoenix motif during Sassanid era by focusing on the different body parts of phoenix.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This research persuades to discover and introduce the ancient Persian beliefs and culture. The researcher tries to find out the recorded information in an ancient composite motif. Also this research introduce ancient Persian art that is mixed with the past culture and beliefs in Persia and even foreign ancient cultures to the art history.

### **1.5 Research Objective**

- a. The objective of this ongoing research is to analyze the importance of the phoenix as a symbol of the Sassanid dynasty during the declining Sassanid dynasty.

### **1.6 Limitation of the Research**

The first limitation is time to preparing the related information about the topic. The second limitation is about the few information on Sassanid phoenix and the lack of Iranian studies scholars who are expert enough on Sassanid phoenix to contribute their ideas in this research. The third limitation is about dispersion of Sassanid phoenix motifs around the world and foreign museums, that contact with them is very difficult.

### **1.7 Research Questions**

- a. What is the form of Sassanid phoenix?
- b. What is the identity of Sassanid phoenix motif?
- c. How was the Sassanid phoenix motif developed?

### **1.8 Scope of the Research**

The researcher selected five samples of Sassanid phoenix motifs. These five samples that are dated during the end of Sassanid era (6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century) share similarities in their

body structures. They are created in Persia but are currently housed in foreign museums, such as British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Hermitage museum in Saint Petersburg and Bonyad Museum in Tehran.



**Figure 1 Samples of Sassanid Phoenix chosen for the research, 1 (Lees, 2017), 2 (Sasanian Empire, 2017), 3 (Simorgh the Persian bird, 2009), 4 (Shafiee, 2007), 5 (Paintres.com, 2016)**



## 1.9 Theoretical Framework

Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), as a formalist, was one of the two most famous and influential approaches taken in twentieth-century on art history. One of the aspects of this approach, according to Panofsky, is about Iconography which focuses on themes and ideas and concern with the subject matter or meaning of art works. He also attempts to find the ground of his interpretations in a sound account of artistic form (Michael Hatt, 2006, p. 96). Most ambitiously, he hopes to give interpretations of art works that would show them to be symbolic expressions of the cultures within which they were created (Michael Hatt, 2006, p. 96). Panofsky described his method in three stages: first, a concern for the formal elements of art; second, the iconographical analysis of its subject matter; and third, an iconological analysis to show how the works under consideration formed part of the culture in which they had been produced (Michael Hatt, 2006, p. 96).

While every artwork is specific to its culture, he also observes every cultural expression as a characteristic articulation of a certain essential tendencies of the human mind (Michael Hatt, 2006, p. 96). The mind for Panofsky is universal too, it means it's related to every cultural expression and particularly, it is articulated in a particular way in a particular historical context (Michael Hatt, 2006, p. 96). Then, he explains about the hermeneutic problem: because the mind is both universal and particular, it can be understood the art objects as historically and culturally specific, and yet interpret them from another historical point of view (Michael Hatt, 2006, p. 96).

So according to the theory of Erwin Panofsky about Iconography, this research examines each part of Sassanid phoenix in three steps; the first, a description of the visual aspects, study of general formal art and formal elements that created the phoenix. Secondly it references other sources in literature. Thirdly, it examines the contextual information in Sassanid holy and historic books. At last, but not least the researcher shows

some symbols produced during the same and earlier period to proof the claimed content.

Here, the factors that can affect in creating a symbol or icon is traditions and culture of people, religions, environment, different cultures impact and history.

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## **CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Overview**

In this part, the research introduces the Erwin Panofsky's theory about iconography study and his approach for analyzing a historical icon to understand it as well. Then, research provides a brief history of Persian and Sassanid art of before emerging Islam in Iran. After that, the researcher surveys on each animal's values and role in the sacred books and culture of ancient Sassanid dynasty, which construct the Sassanid Phoenix body. The body parts of Simorgh is divided into the head, wings, tail, paws and delicate vegetal motifs that decorated the Sassanid phoenix (Simorgh) wings. Related information is collected from the historical books and sacred Avesta. At last, the researcher explains a summary of the review.

### **2.2 The Art of Persia before the beginning of Islam**

Irene Rima Makaryk (1993) in his book of "Encyclopaedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms" states that:

"According to Panofsky, iconology seeks to understand the total meaning of a work of art in its historical and cultural context. Thus, a work of art is to be treated as a concrete historical document in the study of a civilization, or period, to bridge the gap between art history and other historical studies" (Makaryk, 1993, p. 555).

History of ancient Iran is known from Median government (about 708-550 BC) until the end of Sassanid dynasty (651-224 CE). On that period of history, there were several dynasties that existed for a limited period. Iran's pre-Islamic historical periods are as follow: Median around 708-550 BC then, Achaemenid 550-330 BC, Seleucid 330-250 BC, next Parthian 250 BC-226 AD and finally Sassanid from 224 to 651 AD.

Ayatollahi (2003), states that:

“In the past, the land we now call Iran extended far beyond its present borders. This region did not possess specific boundaries and has, throughout history, undergone many changes. From a geographic point of view, Iran is a plateau surrounded by majestic mountain ranges. This plateau can be pictured as a large triangle situated between the Indus valley on the east, the Zagros Mountains on the west, the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus Mountains and the Tigris River on the north and the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in the south. A large number of the historic mysteries of this vast land could be clarified a process similar to what did for the legends of Homer in Greece” (Ayatollahi, 2003, p. 3).

Ayatollahi (2003) also mentions that up to now “a large part of the remains discovered in Shahdad, many of the symbols and characters present in Mirmalas and other similar caves, and even some of the abstract and pictographic patterns seen on decorated Persian earthenware have not been studied extensively and accurately” (Ayatollahi, 2003, p.5).

### **2.3 The Art of the Sassanid Dynasty**

As Ayatollahi (2003) believes “Fars is one of the provinces that preserved its independent rule throughout the Parthian period in spite of pledging to the Parthian dynasty to act as the protector of Zoroastrianism and the Persian traditions of the Achaemenids” (Ayatollahi, 2003, p. 116).

He (2003) also continues that “from a political point of view, the Sassanid succeeded in expanding their realm as far as the old Achaemenid borders. They also created a magnificent new era in the history of Persian art through the architecture and other rich collections they left behind. This rich assortment of artworks includes bas-reliefs left on the rocky cliffs of the country, seals and silver object discovered in various excavations and exquisite sample of silk cloth that now adorn the museums and churches of the West,

in addition to the magnificent palaces they built for the kings” (Ayatollahi, 2002, pp. 116-17).

Ayatollahi (2003) adds “in spite of regarding themselves as a “philhellenes” nation, during the first centuries of their reign, the Parthians took major steps towards the development of a style of art that could represent the nature the Persians. They may have been inspired by the Greeks, the Greco-Romans or by the Buddhists of the East but the impression they left on the art of these people was by far much deeper than those they received particularly where architecture is concerned” (Ayatollahi, 2002, p. 118).

Ayatollahi (2003) also talks about , the city of Bishapur, that was built by Shapur I in a shape of the ancient Greek cities, in form of rectangular. Before that, circular cities were customary during Sassanid dynasty. Bishapur means “the beautiful city of Shapur”, and was originally a royal city which consisted of a number of palaces, fire temples and a selection of political and military buildings. The palace of Shapur was built with cobblestones and held together by mortar and follows the traditions of Persian architecture in design and methods of construction. This structure sits alongside a smaller palace, a royal fire temple, and a lateral rectangular shaped hall. The main structure consists of a square room surrounded by four porches each with three rooms built around it. The area underneath the dome is shaped like a cross and is surrounded by four blind arcades with sidewalls clad in stucco and decorated with stucco decorations. These decorations include a wide variety of shapes, forms and bright colors. It is possible that parts of this building, particularly the decorations and ornaments were built by Greco-Roman or Byzantine artists.

According to Ayatollahi (2002) “after defeating the Romans, Shapur brought back 70,000 Roman prisoners including Emperor Valerian to Persia. Some of the prisoners

who stayed on in the country included artists, architects, builders and a number of mosaic workers” (Ayatollahi, 2002, p. 120)

He (2002) continues “the mutual influence of eastern and western Persian art during the Sassanid period is another important fact worth noting for it was such influences that enriched and even completed this art. Any foreign and alien elements that ever entered into Persian art were gradually altered in the hands of Persian artists and transformed into a completely Persian feature” (Ayatollahi, 2002, p. 147).

Dr. Najma Heptulla (1991) states in her book:

“In the third century, there was a country recovery in Persia and a new empire came as a controller. They called their Empire “Sassanid dynasty”, which was sharply nationalistic and claimed to be the replacement of the old Achaemenid kings. As typically happens with an aggressive nationalism, this was narrow and intolerant. It had to become so because it was impacted in between the Roman Empire and the Byzantine Empire of Constantinople the west, and the advancing Turkish tribes on the east. It still manages to carry on for more than four hundred years, right up to the advent of Islam. The Zoroastrian priesthood was all-powerful under the Sassanid, and their minister organized the state and was strict of all hostility. It was during this period that the final version of their sacred book, the Avesta, have been prepared” (Heptulla, 1991, p. 10).

Heptulla (1991) also mentions:

“during Sassanid era the Gupta Empire succeeded, which was also a national recovery after the Kushan and Buddhist periods. There was a renaissance of art and literature, and some of the nicest of Sanskrit authors, such as Kalidas, be alive at that time. There are many hints that Persia of Sassanid had artistic exchanges with India of the Guptas.

Few paintings or sculptures of the Sassanid era discovered in temporary time. However, those that have been found are energetic and movement, the animal being very same as those in the Ajanta wall painting” (Heptulla, 1991, p. 11).

She (1991) adds “it seems that Sassanid artistic influence extended to China. The Sassanid Empire also kept active foreign relations with China, and diplomats from Persia frequently traveled to China” (Heptulla, 1991, p. 13).

Di Castro and Templeman (2015) believe “the Sassanid kingdom that was established by Ardashir I after the defeat of Ardavan V, the last Arsacid king, in 226 CE, was to last from the third to seventh century”. They continue that “the art of the period- based on that of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BCE) and on ancient Near Eastern elements- prove the relationship with older Persian artistic traditions”. In their view “Sassanid art shows the consistency of Arsacid culture because, before the Arsacids, culture and art had tended to possess strong Iranian characteristics” (Angelo Andrea Di Castro, 2015, p. 197).

Di Castro and Templeman (2015) add:

“This art had passed over the eastern borders of the kingdom and proceeded to lay the foundation of the “Iran-Buddhist” art which was found in the modern land of Afghanistan and as far east as China. It became the link between the ancient Asian civilizations and those of the medieval West, linking them to the new Islamic ones. Sassanid art was a mixture of ancient Near Eastern art with Hellenistic elements, overlaid with Persian spirit and it played an important role in the formation of Asian and European art from the Far East to the Atlantic Ocean coast” (Tucci, 2015, p. 197).

Xinru Liu (2010) mentions “sought after by the Han Empire in China (206 B.C. - 220 A.D.) by applying the weaving technology of woolen textiles to shiny silk yarn, Iranian artisans produced a unique style of textile” (Liu, 2010, p. 81)

Xinru Liu (2010) also adds:

“So far, no silk textiles made during Sassanid rule have been found within the boundaries of Iran. Scholars have listed many silk samples found outside the empire’s boundaries as “Sassanid” because their decorative features have a high similarity to the motifs depicted on the best clothes of the Sassanid kings whose full-bodied images were carved in bas-relief on rock faces. The Simorgh, a royal motif on Sassanid silver vases and other artistic media, displayed on the coat of the Sassanid king Khusro II, on the statue of him riding his horse, among the government-sponsored rock carving at Tak-i-Bustan. The Simorgh must have been a pattern used on royal silk textiles” (Liu, 2010, p. 81).

Xinru Liu (2010) states “the Sassanid Artists learned from earlier Roman artisans”. At the time “the Sassanid army occupied the Mediterranean coast, they took Roman Empire artisans as prisoners and relocated them in Iran to work for them”. Then “control over this coastal region later shifted between the Byzantines and the Persians. Even though the Byzantines held the Persians in contempt, Sassanid motifs, such as the Simorgh, were commonly found on Byzantine artworks in the centuries after Justinian” (Liu, 2010, pp. 80-81).

Curtis and Stewart (2010) state “the dynastic art of the Sassanid heartlands, given a stereotyped but in a unique format, an early period was a visual expression of Sassanid power and authority. The corpus of motifs and designs utilized by Sassanid artists was selectively drawn from the art of the contemporary Roman and Parthian worlds but ancient, significant themes and images, some going back to Achaemenid times, were not forgotten” (Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, 2010, p. 101).

Curtis and Stewart (2008) also mention:



“The early successes, both military and socio-political, of the Sassanid rulers, led to a broad recognition of their supremacy and their position among contemporary powers. Not surprisingly, Sassanid dynastic icons were soon adopted and adapted beyond the borders of the kingdom. At first, in newly acquired territories on the eastern borders of Sassanid realm, a different but related imagery, based on Sassanid patterns, was created by rulers’ intent on expressing their regional authority. Eventually, the prestige of the Sassanid dynasty, the extent of the empire, and the long duration of the period in which the kings held power led to a much more widespread transfer of Sassanid motifs and icons. In lands beyond the Near East, both to the east and to the west, the art of the Sassanid court became synonymous with world rule and imperial aspirations, influencing the cultures of other political centers, not only during the period of Sassanid hegemony but also in the centuries following the collapse of the dynasty” (Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, 2008, p. 101).

#### **2.4 Simorgh (Phoenix)**

Garry and El-Shamy (2005) write in the book “Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature” that “Many ancient religions and cultures believed birds important in their mythology, legend, and folktale tradition, believing that they possess powers of prophecy and associating them with gods. The phoenix and griffin are examples of such birds. They seem to possess the ability to talk, offering guidance to humans, guarding treasures, and sending messages to gods”. They (2005) add about phoenix or Simorgh that “stories of the fabulous birds have parallels with stories of the garuda of India, the Simorgh of Persia, the anka of Arabia and Turkey, the feng-huang of China, and the bennu of Egypt” (Garry & Shamy, 2005, p. 80).

Each phoenix in a different culture has different characteristic. The present research investigates only on Sassanid Simorgh or phoenix.

## 2.5 Simorgh Role in the Persian Literatures

Because phoenix is a single creature that is created with several animals with individual characteristics and value during ancient time, it seems that all those animals in one body together was created a new especial meaning. So, the researcher refers to the documents that mention about Persian Phoenix such as Shahnameh by Firdausi where it is explained about Sassanid history in a pattern of poem.

According to the Shahname in the story named “Zal”, Simorgh saved the Albino baby life who was the king’s son when he was rejected by his father and servants through him in the mountain. While Simorgh was flying, and looking for food for her chicks find the baby and took him with his claws and flied to her nest. The Simorgh chicks instead of eating the baby fell in love with him and treated him like a brother (Ferdowsi, 2000, pp. 49-54).

In the Shahname also it is mentioned that Simorgh gave some of her feathers to the Zal to burn them in his trouble times. So, in the story named Rostam, and is written in Shahname, it is mentioned when the Zal’s wife had problem in giving birth, he burned a Simorgh feather. Ferdowsi mentioned “straightway a sound of rushing wings filled the air, and the sky was darkened and the bird of God stood before Zal” (Ferdowsi, 2000, p. 101).

Also, somewhere else in the Shahnameh, it is mentioned that Rostam took the arrow that was given to him of the Simorgh, and he let it fly towards his enemy (Ferdowsi, 2000, p. 472).

Attar of Nishapur who was a poet and theoretician of Sufism in Iran (1145-1220) explained in the stories that have attracted the attention of mystics and Sufis in Iran is about the traveling of birds to visit the Simorgh. In this story birds gathered in a congress

to select a king but Hoopoe said that only Simorgh is deserve for this position. So, they travelled a long way and passed a lot of troubles to reach the Simorgh. In this story Simorgh is a symbol of Right and secret of the God and literary that the birds through the unity and cooperation together finally reached to the comprehension that fact Simorgh is their Unity and solidarity of them (Kavir, 2016, p. 349).

According to Kavir (2016), an Iranian historian and scholar, Simorgh is the only creature who knows the secret of death and life and she can treat the unknown sickness. He added, Simorgh is carrying the immortality seed in her mouth and gives life to humans (Kavir, 2016, p. 349).

## **2.6 Simorgh Motif during the Sassanid Dynasty**

The Simorgh belongs to the ancient Iranian tradition. It is prominently mentioned in the Persian national epic, Firdausi's Shahnameh (The book of King), compiled around the turn of the first millennium CE. There it saves the newborn Zal, the son of Sam, who had been leave in the desert because, while his face was really attractive, his hair was totally white. At first, the bird takes Zal to her nest in the Alborz Mountains of northern Iran as her chick's lunch. Then she pities him and raises him until he had grown up. In the numerous images illustrating this story in Persian document tradition, the Simorgh usually depicted with a colorful plumage and a long tail. The Simorgh's feathers possess special benevolent qualities that link them to the qualities of the varengana bird mentioned in the Zend-Avesta, the sacred scripture of Zoroastrianism: "if a man holds a bone of that strong bird, or a feather of that strong bird, no one can smite or turn to fight that fortunate man. The feather of that bird brings him help; it brings unto him the homage of men, it maintains in him his glory". In the Sahnameh, Zal calls the Simorgh for help by burning her feather; when the Simorgh appears, she advises Zal how to heal his wife after their son Rostam has been cut from her belly; as a last step, he should strike her body with the

Simorgh's feather "since the shadow is auspicious". In a similar manner, Rostam is healed after being mortally wounded by Esfandiyar". (Weinstock, 2014, p. 50)

The iconographic features of a Sassanid phoenix include the head of a snarling dog, the paws of a lion and the tail of a peacock, with the addition of the plant motifs on the tail or hanging out of the mouth being allusions to its role in regenerating plants.

## **2.7 Places Where Simorgh Motifs are Situated**

Sassanid Simorgh motif is depicted on several places and dishes that seems to be a sign of official royalty in Iran. Discovered motif on the western part of the Afrasiab Wall in Samarqand city, shows a king who was wearing clothes with the same phoenix (Simorgh) motifs. Markus Mode (Professor of the Institute of Oriental Archaeology and Art, Martin Luther University, Germany) believes that, because Simorgh is depicted on the Khosro body of the Taq-e Bostan, it is impossible to think about it as a simple motif. He says that, probably Sassanid Simorgh motif shows the last Sassanid king's body. Since the approximate date of the construction image of Simorgh motifs are coincide to the end of Sassanid Empire in which between one hundred figures engraved on the wall, only one figure's garment has been adorned with Simorgh motif. A similar silky garment displayed in the Cernuschi Museum in Paris. Also, some pic of silky cloth, silvery and golden vessels belong to same era shows the Simorgh with the same template and design (Mode, 2006, pp. 107-128).

## **2.8 Simorgh Body Parts During the Sassanid Era**

### **2.8.1 Head: Dog**

Deniz Karakurt (2011) states in "Turkish Mythology/ Glossary", that "according to Kyrgyz mythologies records phoenix have seen sometimes with a dog head". (Karakurt, 2011, p. 78)

### **2.8.1.1 Significance of Dog in Ancient Iran**

Gershevitch (1985) explains that “dog has the right same as a human in society and any harming and damage by a human for the dog had punishment and dog were of great position and loved throughout Iran. Among the (genuine) dogs privileged were the herd dog, the household-guarding dog, the investigator, and the skilled dog in tricks and jugglery; this order shows the relative amount of importance attributed to each type” (Gershevitch, 1985, p.661).

Gershevitch continues “familiarity and love for the dog took about a certain attitude to its simulated anthropomorphism. Especially the interesting passage in Avesta , where the dog is elaborately compared for its traits to the priest, a warrior, a minstrel, a thief, a night hunter a hooker, and a child; seems here to have a hint of an old mystery catechism” (Gershevitch, 1985, p. 661).

### **2.8.1.2 Significance of Dog during the Sassanid Era**

Asatrian and Arakelova (2014) state:

“in ancient Iran, dog is the most esteemed creature. In Zoroastrianism and Mithraism, the dog was considered to the second significant after a human being. In the Avestan Vendidad (or Videvdat) a whole chapter is devoted to the dog and its varieties, descriptions of its virtues and of that punishment one will suffer if one kills a dog, harms it or even feeds it badly. The Zoroastrian Book of the Righteous Viraz narrates about the arduous trials which people’s soul must suffer if they, during their lifetime, hit or kill a dog, or even begrudge food for shepherd or sentry dogs. In Sassanid Iran, it was believed that those who did not like dogs’ barking were doomed to spend their days in foreign lands and be unlucky” (Asatrian & Arakelova, 2014, p. 110)

According to Longenecker (1989) “Sassanid dynasty (225-640 A.D.) adopted Zoroastrianism as the state religion. According to Sassanid custom, the dead person should be seen by a dog, which was an animal revered by Zoroastrians. To bury a man or a dog on the earth was to be guilty of defiling the earth” ( Longenecker, 1989, p. 40).

Juergensmeyer and Roof (2011) state that “dogs play a role in the ritual practices of Zoroastrians, as their gaze is believed to area off evil spirits” ( Juergensmeyer, 2011, p. 1407).

Hekster and Zair (2008) state that “the treaty which Philip and Shapur made in 244 A.D. is also mentioned, as an oath between the wolves (the Persians) and the dogs (Philip and his son) who are the guardians of flock (the inhabitants of the Roman Empire)” (Zair & Hekster, 2008, p. 19)

Ehsan Yarshater (2009) mentions that “in the Zoroastrian tradition the dog is a positive figure, its presence required in some rituals. At times mention is made of the rabid dog and the fact that those bitten by one will avoid water. According to some mystics, sinners will be transformed into dogs on Judgment Day” (Yarshater, 2009).

### **2.8.1.3 Suggestions of Dog Head of Simorgh**

Weinstock (2016) states that “An interesting feature of the phoenix is the addition of ears, which may be a development from an earlier crest or from dog aspect of Persian Simorgh, which was a similar composite of bird and quadruped” (Weinstock, 2016, p. 305).

Garver and Phelan (2016) state:

“unquestionably, the Byzantine silk used to make chasuble is of extraordinarily high quality. A heavy samite that is a rich silk fabric interwoven with gold and silver

threads, used for dressmaking and decoration in the Middle Ages. With the unusually wide loom width of 7 ½ feet (232 Cm), this monochrome silk has woven pattern of large medallions enclosing Simorgh, mythical Persian beasts that are a sort of peacock with the claws of a lion and the head of a dog” (Garver & Phelan, 2016, p. 97).

Xinru Linu (1998) believes “the basic shape of the imaginary animal to resemble a gigantic reptile, the Simorgh motif bears little resemblance to a dragon. The big tail on a Simorgh motif looks like the tail of a peacock motif in early Indian art. Without the characteristic horns of the dragon, the head of a Simorgh looks like that of a dog. The Simorgh is more like a combined mammal and bird than a gigantic reptile” (Liu, 1998 , p. 81).

## **2.8.2 Paws: Lion**

### **2.8.2.1 Significance of Lion in Ancient Persia**

Seruij states:

“lion is one of the animals which were widely used in ancient Persia as sculptures and on the as a relief for palace decoration, in fire temples, graves, on plates and jewelry; particularly for the period of the Achaemenid Empire. Documents are found in Persepolis, Susa, Hyrcania, etc.” Seruij mentioned, “In the Middle Eastern art, music, and literature, both Arabic and Persian, lion observed as the symbol of bravery, courage, royalty and liberality” (Seruij, pp. 23,25).

The religious book about “Mithraism Studies”, explains about “the lion images during Sassanid dynasty which are symbolized the forces of evil, for in Zoroastrianism it represents in the kingdom for the appearance of the Evil in the animal kingdom, which sometimes lion appear with other animals like snake for increasing the power of impression. The lion in Persian religious symbolism is appeared on a number of reliefs at

Persepolis attacking a bull without any clear sign that is a good or bad creature” (Hinnells, 1975, p. 301).

#### **2.8.2.2 Significance of Lion during the Sassanid Era**

According to Professor Mehrdad Kia (2016):

“The historian Tabari wrote that Bahram was selected over Khosrow (Sassanid kings) after he displayed excellent bravery and in a test that required that both candidatures to the throne take the symbols of royalty from between two wild lions. To determine who would achieve the throne of the Sassanid Empire, Khosrow and Bahram were required to fight and kill the lions and thereby win the royal insignia by risking their lives. Khosrow refused to go through the ordeal and declined the challenge. Bahram, however, showed no reluctance. Without any hesitation, he immediately attacked and killed the lions and seized both the robe and crown” (Kia, 2016, p. 238).

Kraemer (1992) mentions that “The element lion was a Sassanid symbol of kingship, and was related in literary tradition” (Kraemer, 1992, p. 44).

#### **2.8.2.3 Suggestions of Lion Paw of Simorgh**

Garver and Phelan (2016) state that “phoenix is a mythical winged animal with the claws of a lion” (Garver & Phelan, 2016, p. 97).

Brenda Rosen (2009) also mentions that “the Simorgh is the mythical bird of Persia, so old it has seen the destruction of the Universe three times over. An immense creature the shape of a peacock with spectacular plumage, it has the claws of a lion and is large enough to carry off an elephant or a whale” (Rosen, 2009, p. 152).



The book of Shahnameh of Firdausi mentions about Simorgh claws where Firdausi hint to “Ahriman was barred from wickedness. Fate stretched its lion’s claws and brought him down” (Firdausi, 1910, p. 246).

### **2.8.3 Tail: Peacock**

#### **2.8.3.1 Significance of Peacock in Ancient Persia**

Copley and Dixon (1828) states that, “this bird is generally admitted to be the most beautiful of the feathered race. The peacock is a native of India, thence brought into Persia and Media, and Sometimes called by ancient poets, ‘the Media bird’, and the ‘Persian peacock’” (Dixon, 1828, p. 317).

Asatrian and Arakelova (2014) also mentions that, “The peacock was a solar symbol in ancient India it symbolized immortality and rebirth, as marked on many ancient images of that bird with the tree of life or at the source of life. In ancient Iran, peacock symbolized the dome of heaven, the heavenly light.” (Asatrian & Arakelova, 2014, p. 23).

Arash Khazeni (2014) mentions:

“one of the bejeweled royal seats of the ancient Persian kings described in the epic Shahnameh or Book of Kings, compiled by Abul Qasim Firdausi which was the famed Peacock Throne (Takht-I Tavus), said to have been in used from the reign of the legendary Iranian king Jamsheed through the times of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 B.C.E), until Alexander of Macedon broke it down upon the Greek conquest of Persia and set it in pieces to Rum (The lands of Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean). Seeking the revival of the Achaemenid imperial standard, Ardeshir Babakan (d. 242 C. E), the founder of Sassanid Empire (224-651 C.E), searched for the lost Peacock Throne, but to no benefit. According to legend, in following years more than a thousand skilled craftsmen from China, Makran, Baghdad, and Fars came

together to rebuild this throne, along with the other Persian bejeweled seats of power. By the control of Khusraw Parviz decorated Peacock throne around with gold, silver, and 140 turquoises set in patterns became the best seat of Sassanid imperial power” (Khazeni, 2014, p. 57).

Werness (2006) also explains that “in the ancient Iran, peacock stood either of the Tree of Life, said to be symbols of man’s dual psychic nature, drawing its life force from the principle of unity. The Persians associated the peacock with royalty, and rulers were enthroned on the Peacock Throne. A Sufi legend, likely of Persian origin, suggests the God created spirit in the form of a peacock. Shown its own divine image in a mirror, the peacock was sized with awe and drops of sweat fell from which all other beings were created. According to the legend, the peacock’s fanned tail symbolizes the cosmic deployment of spirit” (Werness, 2006, p. 320).

#### **2.8.3.2 Significance of Peacock during the Sassanid Era**

Brunner (1978) states, “The peacock was appreciated in Sassanid Iran both for its beauty and courtliness and for its savory flavor. It is found ornamenting stucco-work. At Afrasiab paintings of textiles show Sassanid peacock medallions and use the peacock in a frieze motif” (Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), & Brunner, 1987, p. 108).

Friedenberg (2009) states: “The peacock was prized in Sassanid culture for both its beauty and the rich taste” (Friedenberg, 2009, p. 50).

Açıkyıldız (2014) states that, “The Peacock is the symbol of immortality, rebirth and the unification of opposites. It is a national bird of India. In Persian Iconography, the peacock is usually depicted in pairs on either side of the tree of life and duality of human nature. The depiction of the peacock is known in the Sassanid buildings. The peacock is

a fairly common motif on Sassanid seals and has mostly aesthetic significance” (Açıkyıldız, 2014, p. 78).

### **2.8.3.3 Suggestions of Peacock Tail for Sassanid Phoenix**

Conway (2001) states that “In the Sassanid art of the Middle East, the Simorgh is often seen as a kind of dragon-peacock. Expect for its wide feathered tail, it looks like a Griffin on a silver ewer from that period” (Conway, 2001, p. 95).

Xinru Liu (1998) explains, “The big tail on a Simorgh motif looks like the tail of a peacock motif in early Indian art” (Liu, 1998, p. 81).

### **2.8.4 Wings: Eagle**

#### **2.8.4.1 Significance of Eagle in Ancient Persia**

Aune and Fotopoulos (2006) state “in fact, the eagle has been used as a sign of the head of state and power in many ancient backgrounds from the Persian era onward. Several sources report that Cyrus and later Persian kings used a golden eagle as their ensign, the eagle was either sitting with out stretched wings on a weapon or depicted shield” (David Edward Aune, 2006, p. 274).

In the book “Focusing Biblical Studies: The Crucial Nature of the Persian and Hellenistic Periods” (2012), sited that “Claudius Aelianus, a Roman rhetorician, writing around 200 C.E., recounts the miraculous rescue of baby Gilgamesh by an eagle and recalls that Gilgamesh was not the only great leader with a close encounter with an eagle” (Jon L. Berquist, 2012, p. 121). “I have also heard that Achaemenes the Persian, from whom the Persian nobility descend, was carded for by an eagle.” They (2012) continued and “Indeed, the eagle plays an important role in the history and legends of the Persian Empire. Pierre Briant remarks that this bird is linked to royal Persian power” (Jon L. Berquist, 2012, p. 121)

#### **2.8.4.2 Significance of Eagle during the Sassanid Dynasty**

Canepa (2009) mentions, “The eagle, as well as the crown or diadem that it bestows, could have function as cross-cultural mediator and granter of legitimacy, victory, and divine sanction, much as the winged putto or the diadem bestowed by Ohrmazd on Shapur I’s reliefs at Bishapur did. The numerous instances of winged Victories crowning the emperor also mirrored this purpose, but the uniqueness of the eagle and its appearance in close visual connection with the defeated Sassanid sovereign suggest that it was specifically engineered for this purpose.” (Canepa, 2009, p. 95).

Heckman, Ficca and Nesis (2010) mention that “The Zoroastrian symbol is the Farohar, sometimes considered an image of the Wise Lord, Ahura Mazda, who is depicted as a man from the waist up with the wings and tail feathers of an eagle” (Bud Heckman, 2010, p. 189).

#### **2.8.4.3 Suggestions of Eagle Wings of Sassanid Simorgh**

Brauer (1993) cites that, “In some Synagogues a large bronze empty eggshell is suspended from the ceiling and is known as beta simorgh or beta nisbra, ‘eagle’s egg.’ The Simorgh is the wonder bird that occupies an important place in Persian legend. The Jews connect this use of the eggshell (on which several Bible verses are sometimes written) with Exodus 19:4, ‘I bore you on eagles’ wings’ and Deuteronomy 32:11, ‘Same as an eagle that stirreth up her nest.’ It is further said that the bird duma kaske, ‘green tail,’ which brings earth the grave of Moses, builds its nest on the roof just over the egg” (Brauer, 1993, p. 257).

According to Faber (1816) “The Sassanid Phoenix is said by Herodotus to have resembled an eagle” (Faber, 1816, p. 432).

Alice Mead (2007) also mentions that, “The Simorgh, a gigantic eagle-like bird, part lion, part dog, with huge wings, she lived in the Tree of Knowledge and knew the secrets of fate. One wing was fortune, the other grace.” (Mead, 2007, p. 21).

## **2.9 Vegetal Motifs during Ancient Persia and Sassanid Era**

According to Iranian Historians, Dr. Abolghasem Dadvar and Elham Mansoury (2006) who cite that, “Significance of decorated animals, plants and symbolic motifs in Sassanid art is a subject that needs to investigate about that to understand more about Persian ancestor’s culture and art. The symbolic meaning of tree in every respect, even during contemporary time has mixed with many cultural and life aspects. During ancient Persia especially Achaemenid and Sassanid era tree considered as a symbol of life and palmate tree, fig tree, cedar tree, olive tree, and sycamore tree, cypress tree, pomegranate, Oak, and flowers such as lotus flower that considered sacred in Iran. Also, acanthus leaves influenced by Greek and Roman artist to Sassanid artworks” (Dadvar & Elham, 2006, p. 100).

The motifs, which is depicted on the Simorgh or phoenix body, seem to be a kind of leaves or trees or flowers. During the time, which this research was ongoing, there was no suggestion about the motifs which has been depicted on the Sassanid phoenix figure. Then, the researcher has investigated on the important herbs and plants, which is mentioned in the ancient literature and the holy book of Zoroastrianism during ancient Persia and specifically Sassanid era.

According to Erwin Panofsky (a German art historian during 1892-1968) based on a study on the iconographic value of an icon “every single artwork is a reflection of its culture”. He also mentioned “every cultural appearance as a specific voicing of certain necessary tendencies of the social mind”. “The mind”, for Panofsky, “is both global (it lies behind every cultural expression) and specific (that is, it is spoken in an exact way in

a particular historian background)". So, "Panofsky was giving his own answer to the hermeneutic problem: because the mind is both universal and particular, we can recognize art objects as archeologically and culturally aspects, and yet interpret them from another historical excellence point" ( Hatt & Klonk, 2006, p. 6).

### **2.9.1 Herb Leaves and Trees in the Ancient Sacred Persian Book**

Tree from the fertility aspect is a sanctification device in Iran. In general, religious beliefs had a direct influence on the ancient people and it is one of the reasons that the plants were sacred. For example, during ancient Iran according to the ancient stories, "Zoroaster brought the cedar tree from heaven and planted that next to a Temple. According to these stories and other religious reasons some of the plants and trees considered as heavenly and sacred plants and trees with ergogenic properties, healer and scraper poisoning value" (Mobini & Shafeie, 2015, p. 47).

According to the ancient book of Vendidad (Vidēvdād) or Laws against the Demons Avesta (1898) - The Sacred Books of Zoroastrianism, Book3:

"It has already been seen (Farg. VII, 44) that there are three kinds of medicine one that heals with the knife, one that heals with herbs, and one that heals with sacred spells. The present Fargard deals with the origin of medicine, particularly the herbs-medicine. Its inventor was Thrīta, of the Sāma family, to whom Ahura Mazda brought down from heaven ten thousand healing plants that had been growing up around the tree of eternal life, the white Hom or Gaokerena (§ 4). This Thrīta is mentioned only once again in the Avesta, in Yasna 9.7, where he appears to have been one of the first priests of Haoma. This accounts for his medical skill; as Haoma is the plant of eternal life, it is but natural that one of his first priests should have been the first healer" (Peterson, 1898., p. 166).

William F. Warren (2013) states, “among the Persians the legendary tree of paradise took on two forms, according as it was viewed with predominant reference to the universe as an organic whole, or to the vegetable world as proceeding from it. (Warren, 2013)”. In the first aspect, “it was the Gaokerena (Gokard) tree, or ‘the white Hom’ (Haoma= Soma); in the second, the ‘tree of all seeds’, the ‘tree opposed to harm’. (Warren, 2013). Of the former it is written ‘Everyone who eats it becomes immortal; ... Also in the renovation of the universe they prepare its immortality therefrom; it is the chief of plants’. Of the second we read, in like manner as the animals, with grain of fifty and five species and twelve species of medicinal plants, have arisen from the primeval ox, so ten thousand species among the ordinary plants, have grown from all these seeds of the tree opposed to harm, the many-seeded. (Warren, 2013). When the seeds of all these plants, with those from the primeval ox, have arisen upon it, every year the bird (simorgh) strips that tree and mingles all the seeds in the water; Tishtar seizes them with the rainwater and rains them on to all regions” (Warren, 2013).

#### **2.9.1.1 Tree of Life in Ancient Persian Culture**

Andrew Collins (2001) states that “From Aryana Vaejah (the first Iranians) had come the first humans, as well as the dynasty of Pishdadian kings, the heroic race that began with Kiyumars, the first king, and ended with the dynasty of Nariman and Sam. (Collins, 2001, p. No Page Number). Here, too, could be found Mount Elburz- the abode of the Simorgh, Iran’s most Holy Mountain, which is referred to in Zoroastrian tradition as Mount Hara, or Mount Harburz. Although these legends quite obviously related to mythological realms of fanciful construction, there was good reason to suggest that the concept of Aryana Vaejah had been based on actual geographical locations that certainly played a significant role in the development of Iran’s most ancient cultures, perhaps even the genesis of the Iranian race” (Collins, 2001).

Collins (2001) adds “To the south of Mount Elburz, or Hara, was the so-called Vourushaka Sea, a huge expanse of water that supposedly covered one third of the world and was the gathering-point of all water (Collins, 2001). In the center of this inland sea, presumably on an island, were said to have been two divine trees- the first being the Tree of All Remedies, which was also known as the tree of all seeds, or the Simorgh tree (Collins, 2001). On the branches wondrous tree, the ‘King of birds’ perched, even though this tradition obviously contradicted Firdausi’s Shahnameh account, which placed the Simorgh actually on Mount Elburz. Nearby this tree was the ‘mighty Gaokerena’ tree, which possessed healing properties and bore fruit that provided immortality to those souls that achieved salvation, a reference once again to the haoma plant. Together these two sacred trees equated respectively with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of life in the Book of Genesis” (Collins, 2001).

Windischeniann (1864), states that “ancient Iranian culture were familiar with two trees, one called Gaokerena, bearing the white Haoma, the other called the Painless tree. These two trees are the same as the one fig tree out of which the Indians believe the world to have been created. Now, first, the Indians believed no such thing, and secondly, there is same difference between one and two trees as there is between North and South” (Windischeniann, 1864, p. 445).

Windeschemann (1864) adds “however we confess that until we know a good deal more about these two trees of the Iranians, we feel no inclination whatever to compare the painless tree with the tree of knowledge of good and evil, though admitting that the white Haoma tree might remind us of the tree of life, considering that Haoma, as well as the Indian Soma, was supposed to give immortality to those who drank its juice. We likewise consider the comparison of the Angels who keep way of the tree of life with the protectors of the Soma in the Veda and Avesta, as deserving attention, and we should see



the etymological derivation of Cherubim from Simorgh and of Angels from the Sanskrit, serpents, and devils, either confirmed or refused” (Windischeniann, 1864, p. 445).

There are many of trees which are called the “tree of life” with different features. According to Paine (1990), “trees can be depicted as a sacred tree, a flowers pot, a fountain, or some symbol of local iconographies, such as an eagle or a heart. It may be a simple linear pattern intended to signify a particular tree, such as a palm, or to convey the general concept of growth and fertility. When the tree of life is depicted as an actual tree, it is often stylized to convey mythological significance” (Paine, 1990, p. 72).

According to Hinnells (1985), which claims, “plants during ancient times of Iran had an important value. According to the motifs that are depicted on the stones, seals, and potteries that are discovered from those times, it can be possible that a number of these motifs considered sacred that in different periods based on the traditions, beliefs and religions a specific plant had higher significance in compare with other plants. It seems that mythological importance and sanctity of trees and plants among the Iranians, rooted in the creation story of the father and mother of human. That at first popped in a form of joined together plants” (Hinnells, 1985, p. 57). He (1985) adds, “the first human couple emerged in a form of plant, this means that males and females were not recognizable. The created together a tree that its fruits were included ten human races. And when it shaped like a human figure God awarded their responsibility and said ‘You are from human egg, you are the world parents, and I have dedicated the complete capabilities for you. Think to good things, speak with good words, do the good deeds, do not follow the devil’ (Hinnells, 1985, p. 57)”.

Amouzegar (2010) argues that “the trees were respected for their life and fertility aspects. In general, the religious beliefs during ancient times had a direct influence on the people beliefs and caused that plants were considered sacred. For example, according to

ancient Persian legends, Zoroaster brought the cypress tree from the heaven and plant it next to a fire temple. Or the 'Hom' tree was considered as Ohrmazd's son and a divine priest" (Amouzegar, 2010, p. 33).

#### **2.9.1.2 Cypress**

Cypress tree that is seen regularly in the Persepolis carved motifs, had a sacred value in religious beliefs during ancient Iran. This tree was considered sacred even in Mithraism. In the Iranian legendary, it is mentioned that "the cypress tree is a symbol of the God of vegetal. Mithras is somewhat a symbol of vegetals God. Cypress motif can be seen in Mithras temples a lot" (Bahar M. , 1997, p. 275).

#### **2.9.1.3 Pomegranate Tree**

"Pomegranate is one of the sacred trees during ancient Persia and even now. Iranians plant this tree in the sacred places and top of the hills" (Dezfuli, 2006, p. 204). Pomegranate was considered sacred "because of its green leaves and the unique shape of its fruits that look like the fire. Pomegranate was a symbol of blessing and fertility because of the huge amount of seeds inside of this fruit. Pomegranate had aesthetical value among the east art but during Sassanid dynasty it had a sacred value" (Dezfuli, 2006, p. 204).

#### **2.9.1.4 Sycamore Tree**

Because the middle motif on the phoenix wings seems to be similar to sycamore tree which was one of the sacred trees during ancient Persia and especially Sassanid era, the research also studies about this especial tree.

"Ancient Iranians had an especial attention to the trees, and especially to the sycamore tree. Achaemenid kings always appreciated the sycamore tree and used to keep a golden sycamore along a golden vine that often put it in the king's bedroom for praying" (Pourkhaleghy, 2001, p. 116). "Great Cyrus received a golden sycamore with a golden

vine in the Minor Asia as a gift. Khashayar Shah ordered a huge sycamore tree to the palace and protect it. Sycamore tree was a symbol of royalty” (Pourkhaleghy, 2001, p. 116). In fact, sycamore was a symbol of the king. “Sycamore tree because of its wide shadow and its beautifulness and greenery and also because of its nature that every year renew its skin in the thought of people became fresh and young have a significant value in Persian culture” (Pourkhaleghy, 2001, p. 116).

“They were and exist and still using to tell their dreams to the tree and believe one day their dreams coming true. In the peoples’ beliefs, sycamore tree is capable of bringing the rain, force the sun to be shiny, enhances the flocks, helps to the pregnant women, and finally, fulfill a vow” (Bahar D. M., 2007, p. 47). “Sycamore tree is a symbol of blessing and brings eternal blessings from God the world and they believed that the strong spirits of died people or Gods and angel were lived inside this tree” (Bahar D. M., 2007, p. 47). “Sassanid people after emerging Islam explained a new justification for the sanctity of this great trees and for being not contrary to Islamic traditions often reach to that result that under each sycamore tree a holy man is buried” (Bahar D. M., 2007, p. 47).

#### **2.9.1.5 Lotus Flower**

This flower was considered sacred during ancient Persia among the people who were Zoroastrians because this flower used to grow up from the marsh and they believed that it is not a suitable environment for life although it’s not a reasonable reason for nurturing a bad man. This flower is a symbol of the Goddess Venus in Iranian mythology that had an important place in the ancient rituals of Iran. Lotus is a symbol of water Goddess too (Dehkhoda, 1985).

“During the ancient time in Persia, people believed that Mithras God was born from the lotus blooms, so it seems that this flower is related to the Mithraism religion as well” (Yahaghi, 2015, p. 429).

Lotus had been considered important since the second Achaemenid kingship with a shape of the trinity (as in Indian tradition) by Ormuzd, Anahita and Mithras. “These goddesses played an important role in the art and architecture particularly the architecture of shrines and offering power to Iranian kings. Also, the pillars of Persepolis and Indian architecture of Pataliputra palace represent holy usage of lotus in artistic and architecture works and this had a significant value in the mentioned religions” (Yahaghi, 2015, p. 429).

Bolkhari Gahi (2005) states “Lotus pillars were popular in old Iran art and architecture particularly in pillars of Persepolis. These pillars show the attendance of converse lotus that manifests the idea rooted in mind of the ancient Iranians. This question raises that did the architects of Persepolis pay attention to symbolic perfection, power and life giving aspect of lotus in designing? Lotus was used not only in architecture but also in curved sculptures in Apandana in Achaemenian period. We see a lotus in hand of a king that indicates the mythical status of this floater (Bolkhari Gahi, 2005). These drawings represent that the architects and designers were familiar with value and position of lotus. It seems that attendance of lotus in these parts needs to hesitation since the witness show that such styles were employed before Achaemenian period in Egypt and Mesopotamia zone. Roger Bastid in book of ‘Art and society (art et Societe)’ writes the Egyptians decorated pillars like palm trees and capitals like lotus (Bolkhari Gahi, 2005). He believes that These Egyptians capitals are the oldest origin of spiral decorations in capitals. In the capitals, the lotus flowers are conversed and they are likened to spiral capitals since eighteenth loyal dynasty in the Egypt (1300-1400 BC)” (Bolkhari Gahi, 2005).

Lotus flower is one of the most prominent ancient plant symbols that is influenced by Phoenicia and Egypt civilizations to the ancient East world including Iran. Iranians know the lotus flower as a symbol of sun, perfection, perfection of beauty and fertility. Lotus

in Persian means spiritual blossoming because of its roots in the mud and however, it rises upward to the sky (Hall J. M., 2011). Lotus flower is seen in the reliefs of Persepolis and Taq-e Bostan that had been built during Achaemenid and Sassanid in Iran. Since these flowers are associated with water flowing, Iranians has known it as a symbol of goddess Anahita that she is a goddess of water and linked this flower to the Mithraism religion (Hall J. M., 2011)

## **2.10 Comparative Study on the Ancient Composite Animals in Different Ancient Civilizations**

Similar to Sassanid dynasty, other civilizations around the world such as China, Egypt, Greek and Mediterranean considered some composite animals with different characteristics as their folktales and artworks. Below is a summary about them:

### **2.10.1 Qilin of China**

For example, Jeffery Andrew explains “the Qilin is said to have the body of a deer, the tail of an ox, the hooves of a horse, yellow fur, and a single flesh- covered horn on its head” (Weinstock, 2016, p. 482). The illustration of the physical appearance of the Qilin changed in later times.

According to an anthropologist named Schuyler Cammann “by the Ming dynasty the Qilin had evolved from the single-horned creature to one that has the head of a dragon with a pair of horns. Although horned, the Qilin is a compassionate and benevolent creature that walks rhythmically without treading on insects or damaging the grass. Together with the phoenix, dragon, and tortoise, the Qilin is one of the Four Supernatural Creatures and symbolizes virtue and prosperity” (Weinstock, 2016, p. 482). He added “in folklore, the Qilin is believed to bring talented children to families. The image of an infant riding on a Qilin is a motif that prevails in Chinese art” (Weinstock, 2016, p. 482). Stephanie Pui-Mun Law mentioned “in China, the Qilin is sometimes called the Asian

unicorn. Though it is a gentle creature and a known protector and guardian, its appearance makes it seem more akin to a lion or dragon than a horse” (Law, 2010, p. 104).

In contrast with the Sassanid phoenix, the Qilin has a different feature but both quality and characteristics are positive.

### **2.10.2 Seth of Egypt**

Egypt is another ancient civilization that existed during the late period. There are many pieces of evidence that are recorded in Egyptian illustrations in which, shows they used to consider hybrid animals with different meanings in their culture. One of the examples is a God named Seth.

Rosalie David explains “in general, evidence from the predynastic cemeteries indicated that the Egyptians attempted to give power to the deceased, and to obtain his support and influence on behalf of the living. Amulets were probably provided to endow the deceased with special powers: animal forms included the gazelle, hippopotamus, cow, pig, bull’s head, crocodile, fly, fish, serpent, lion, and the Seth-animal, a strange creature which represented the god Seth but cannot be identified with any known species of animal” (David, 2002). Leon Ashworth says “Seth had no fixed shape. He often borrowed animal bodies to live in” (Ashworth, 2005, p. 18). Leon Ashworth adds, “Seth is often shown as a mythical beast with a jackal-like body and snout, and Alert Square topped ears” (Ashworth, 2005, p. 18). He continues “Seth was the son of Geb and Nut. He married his sister Nephthys and reigned over the desert. He was a deadly rival to his brother Osiris, whose kingdom covered the fertile lands. After killing Osiris, who was just and good, Seth took his place as ruler” (Ashworth, 2005, p. 18). So DK believes “for the ancient Egyptians the god Seth symbolized evil. He was the god of chaos, storms, and war” (DK, 2008, p. 109).

So, in contrast with the Sassanid phoenix with the protective and guardian properties, the Seth was an evil and negative character in the history and folktale of ancient Egypt with a different composition of animals in its creation.

### **2.10.3 Lamassu of Assyria**

Lamassu is another example of an ancient hybrid animal that was created in Assyria (627 BCE) and appeared as a huge sculpture and placed in front of the palaces. Paul Mukendi states, “Lamassu was an Assyrian protective deity, often depicted as having a human head, the body of an ox or lion and bird’s wings” (Mukendi, 2016). He also explains more about this composite animal that “the Assyrians typically placed Lamassu at the entrances of cities and palaces. To the Hittites, Griffins were imaginary winged beasts that guarded holy things” (Mukendi, 2016).

So Lamassu is the same as Sassanid phoenix, both are winged composite beasts with positive and protective characteristics. Lamassu in comparison with Sassanid phoenix has humanistic elements in the head part.

### **2.10.4 Harpies of Greek**

In Greek also archaeologists discovered an especial motif that shows a kind of composite animal called “Harpies”. David Sacks and Oswyn Murray explain about this creature in mythology that “the harpies were winged female demons who would fly down to steal food, people, and so on; their name means ‘snatcher-away’.” They are mentioned in Homer’s epic poem the *Odyssey* (written down circa 750 B.C.) as carrying off the daughters of the hero Pandareus. Hesiod’s *Theogony* (circa 700 B.C.) described them as three in number, named Celaeno “dark”, Ocypete “swift-wing”, and Aello “Storm”. (David Sacks, 1995, p. 104). They explained more that “Harpies are most familiar from Apollonius epic poem, the *Argonautica* (circa 245 B.C.). There, they are said to torment the Tharcian king Phineus on a regular basis by flying down, snatching away his food,

and departing, leaving their feces on everything” (David Sacks, 1995, p. 104). They add “Possibly the Harpies originated as spirits or personification of the wind. In their general role as winged, malevolent females, they resemble the furies and the sirens” (David Sacks, 1995, p. 104).

So Harpies were annoying creatures with negative characteristics in contrast of the Sassanid phoenix that had positive properties.

#### **2.10.5 Griffin of Greek**

Griffin is another hybrid animal in ancient Greek mythology. Perry L. Westmoreland explains about this creature that “has the beak and wide-spreading wings of an eagle, the body of a lion, and the tail of a serpent or scorpion” (Westmoreland, 2007, p. 97). Cecilia De Carli and Grazia Massone believe “for the Greek and the Roman it was the guardian of the tombs, emblem of light (therefore, represented sometimes at the feet of Apollo), poetic inspiration lifting the spirit away from vulgarity and guardian of the pathways to Salvation” (Cecilia De Carli, 2015, p. 29). In addition, they state “for Christians, the Griffin (out of the catacombs in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, as it was perceived as a negative animal) leads the soul to Heaven and represents Christ’s dual nature (Eagle and Lion)” (Cecilia De Carli, 2015, p. 29). Carli explains about Griffin symbolization value that “it is also a symbol of the savior’s wisdom and strength” (Cecilia De Carli, 2015, p. 29).

So, it seems that the Greek griffin and Sassanid phoenix both are winged creatures with the same positive characteristics.

#### **2.10.6 Chimera of Greek**

Chimera is another ancient composite creature. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock states about this creature that “originating in Greek mythology, the Chimera is a female fire-breathing hybrid monster typically composed of a lion, a goat, and a snake” (Weinstock,



The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters, 2016, p. 90). In addition he mentions “as for the upbringing of the Chimera, sources agree that Amisodares, the king of Caria in Asia Minor, raised the Chimera to cause destruction, and when Bellerophon finally arrived, the Chimera was devastating the countryside of neighbouring Lycia” (Weinstock, 2016, pp. 90-91).

Mike Leslie explains, “the Chimera started out as a goddess and became a nightmarish creature that was destroyed by Bellerophon” (Leslie, 2002, p. 176). He added, “the Chimera was a fire-breathing monster that brought terror to the Mediterranean” (Leslie, 2002, p. 176). George Kovacs and C. W. Marshall believe “it served as a symbol of the forces of disorder needing to be tamed by civilization and of the monstrous feminine needing to be subdued by the male hero” (George Kovacs, 2015, p. 101).

So, in contrast with the Sassanid phoenix with a positive and helpful characteristic that used to save the people life, the Chimera in Greek was a monster that had negative characteristics which used to make trouble for the people.

## **2.11 Summary**

In this part, the research, introduced Panofsky’s approaches to analysis of a symbol with an iconic value. According to his theory, for analysis of an icon, one should follow three-steps i.e. first do the formal artistic critical, second, find the subject matter, and at last, find out the historical and cultural backgrounds of the value of the subject matter, with referring to the historical, cultural and religious texts.

So, the researcher categorized the Sassanid phoenix body in parts as head, paws, tail, and wings, then referred to the related literature and historical texts included the ancient Holy book of Avesta during Sassanid dynasty to find out the cultural and sacred value of each participated animal in the body of Sassanid phoenix.

Then, the researcher explained about the vegetal motifs which were depicted on the Sassanid phoenix wings and tail and found out that during Sassanid era some of the plants have been considered sacred among the ancient Persian people, so through the investigation on historical texts that are documented by Iranian art history scholars the researcher has collected the related data which are benefited in this research. At last, the researcher mentioned some examples of other ancient composite animals in the other nations and has compared them with the Sassanid phoenix.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Overview**

This part of research discusses about the approaches that the researcher used for collecting data and the process of analyzing each sample. In this part of the thesis, the researcher introduces the samples that are selected to study from Sassanid phoenix motifs. The current qualitative research selected five samples of Sassanid phoenix and based on the related data among the historical and mysterious books, would like to describe and narrate the significance and function of each item which included in each phoenix. So, the current research would be a qualitative research based on narrating and describing the related data.

### **3.2 Formal and Contextual Analysis**

In order to study the Sassanid phoenix, the researcher selected five samples of phoenix that were depicted during Sassanid era. In the part of data analysis, it is visible that the researcher first, shows the complete picture of each sample then starts to explain and analyze the phoenix motif in formal approaches. Formal approaches mean, to examine the basic elements such as a line, space, color, and structure and totally explain what is visible in the picture.

After this step, since the Sassanid phoenix is a hybrid animal and was created as a combination of several animals, the researcher separates each part of its body such as head, wings, claws, tail and veggie motifs that were depicted inside the tail or wings and compare them with the animals or plants that previously Iranian studies scholars and historians suggested for each part or mentioned as sacred during ancient times in Persia.

After that, according to Erwin Panofsky's theory of iconography and Iconology, the researcher investigates on cultural and religious tendencies that people during ancient Persia had had about each animal or plants and collects the related information from

historical and religious books and ancient Persian literature. Then the researcher investigates in Persian antiques to find similar motifs that proves the design or motifs which belongs to the Persian area or the country and culture that had influenced on Persia during ancient times.

So this research is a qualitative study based on narrative description and analysis on Erwin Panofsky's theory of iconography and iconology.

### **3.3 Samples**

Sample 1: An image of Sassanid phoenix that is depicted on a silk textile and collected in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Lees, 2017)

Sample 2: An image of Sassanid phoenix is carved on a silver and gold plate in Iran 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century, Collected in British Museum (Sasanian Empire, 2017).

Sample 3: An image of Sassanid phoenix is depicted on a wall panel in Iran, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century, collected in British Museum (Simorgh the Persian bird, 2009).

Sample 4: An image of Sassanid phoenix is depicted on a silk cloth in Iran, 224-651 AD, collected in Bonyad Museum in Iran (Shafiee, 2007).

Sample 5: An Image of Sassanid phoenix is depicted on a silver bowl in Iran, 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century, Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia (Paintres.com, 2016).

For collecting data and necessary information researcher referred to the main library in University of Malaya and used the historical books which are written by historians and Iranian scholars in the related field such as mythology of symbols and sacred books during ancient Persia. So, this research uses qualitative methodology according to narrative description in the literature, and formal analysis based on iconography and iconology theory by Erwin Panofsky.

Pictures and images of each samples are taken from the museums' websites (See Figures in the next chapter). The researcher designs a simulation for each sample of Sassanid phoenix with Photoshop software. Then according to Erwin Panofsky's theory at the first step, analyzes the complete Sassanid phoenix according to formal approach. After that, as Panofsky suggested in his theory of Iconography, the researcher refers to the historical culture and for this reason, she separates each parts of Sassanid phoenix in one image beside the illustrated picture of the animals' body parts that seem to be inspired from and/or already suggested by other historians about that inspirations. In this step, the researcher investigates the ancient Persian and Sassanid culture to find out the examples and links to each part of Sassanid phoenix body. Furthermore, the ongoing study describes about religion of ancient time in Persia to find out whether each animal had a sacredness significance or not. Then, the researcher shows examples to prove that each animal had significance value during ancient era.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS**

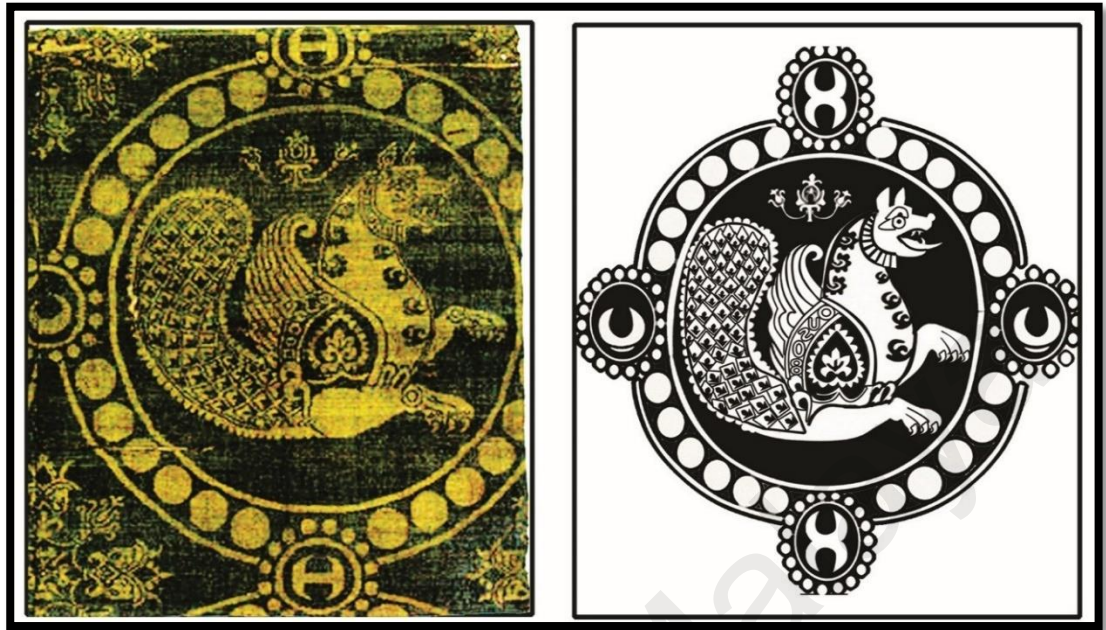
### **4.1 Overview**

In this part of the research, the study investigates the Sassanid phoenix motif samples which are discovered in Persia and recorded in the museums of Iran and abroad, such as Bonyad Museum in Iran, British Museum, Victoria and Albert museum in London and Metropolitan Museum in New York. Data analysis is done according to Erwin Panofsky's theory of iconography and iconology that was mentioned in the framework. Panofsky suggests three steps to investigate an icon; first study on their general formal elements which are the parts which is used to make a piece of artwork; that artworks here are Sassanid phoenix with especial features. The art elements such as line, shape, form, tone, texture, pattern, color, and composition which are often used together, depending on how they are organized in a piece of art, would determine the look of the final piece of artwork. The second step is to study on the subject matter of the artwork to investigate what the artwork is about and to find out which animals the artists employed to create the Sassanid phoenix. The third step is a study on the culture among the Sassanid people that is recorded in the literature, sacred and historical books to find out the cultural values and religious beliefs shaped the creation of the phoenix motif during Sassanid era.

### **4.2 Samples**

In this part, the researcher is showing the samples with an introduction of each one to demonstrate them briefly.

#### 4.2.1 Sample 1



**Figure 2 Sassanid phoenix depicted on the Textile, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Lees, 2017).**

Figure 4.1. This is one of the Sassanid phoenix motifs that was depicted by Persians during Sassanid era about 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century in Iran. The left picture is taken from an article of Zoroastrian Heritage written by K. E. Eduljee, and the object was created around 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Century in Iran and recorded in Victoria and Albert Museum of London at the current time. Techniques seem to be needlework and medium silk textile. The left Sassanid phoenix picture is simulated by the researcher with graphic software.

Picture above shows an imaginative mammal creature with wings which is not reported as a real creature in the current and real world so far. The creature looks like a combination of different animals. The position of its head and body is from side view while its tail looks from front view. Its head seems to belong to an animal with sharp teeth and its tongue comes out of it, and its tendency is to upward. Its mouth is open. Eyes are looking

at front and it has a necklace in its neck. The claws look strong and big with long nails which looks they are ready to fight. Its wing also looks from side view which seems to be open and in the flying scene. The bottom part of wing decorated with some motifs that seems to be similar to veggie and plants motif. Its tail looks huge and wide which has been decorated with geometrical and tiny motifs inside the square motifs. Whole of this creature has been set in a center of circular frame.

The motif is depicted based on a two-dimensional space. Artist used curved and diagonal lines for creating this motif. The artist, through the repeat of several regular thin black and yellowish curved lines together that is twisted on the upper part and gathered in one point, made a shape that represent a wing of this mix-creature. Also, inside the tail area, it is obvious that the artist, through the regularly repeated tiny and small square shapes with a tiny black motif inside each square, tried to create a texture that seems its definition of a type of specific shape of tail.

It seems that artist used several various animals and different creatures in an asymmetrical motif that through the gathering of body parts of each animal and installing those all creatures together, had made a unit combination creature or animal in a suitable composition. Then the researcher for understanding more and investigate on each part of this motif separates each parts of body.



#### 4.2.2 Sample 2



**Figure 3 Sassanid plate, gold and silver, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century, with a phoenix motif, British Museum of London (Sasanian Empire, 2017)**

The second sample represents a Sassanid phoenix motif which was depicted on a gold and silver plate by Sassanid people about 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that the artist used the engraving techniques on the metal. There is no enough information about this plate size.

The second sample of Sassanid phoenix is the same as the first sample and is created of several different animals that after combining together in one body, created a single animal that does not exist in the physical world. But through a closer focus on the details and body parts of this animal, it seems each parts of phoenix body are similar to an animal which can be found in the real world.

Something that is emphasized in the face of this creature is the long tongue that hang out from its open mouth. In contrast with its head that looks like a mammal animal, it has two wings that look like in the flying scene. The phoenix arms and claws look strong and muscular. And its tail is the same as the first sample, looks huge and wide but there is a different in the motifs of its tail. Motifs look like a long-curved branch of flowers with a

leaf. Through consideration of all these main aspects of this creature that in the Persian art and culture called Simorgh (phoenix), it can be clear that this creature which had been depicted on a metallic plate, considered as subjective art because this design is come from the Sassanid artist under influences of culture.

Through observing of this motif, it is seen that the Sassanid artist used the smooth carved lines for depicting the Phoenix with shallow carved lines. The whole design was carved as a relief on a metal surface. The artist benefited of the main plate's color but it can be seen that the artist, for separating and creating the illusion of different material of each part of this creature body, used different texture in the artwork. It can be seen that the pattern that the Sassanid artist used is based on repeating in each body part. For example, the artist by repeating the arranged carved dots on the arms and neck created a texture that determines these areas of body and has a different material with the other parts such as tail that designed with a different texture which for this part, the artist, through repeating small arranged curved, created different sense of material for this part. The depth of motif in the outline looks more. The motif location seems to be flying in the forward way.

Here the researcher separated the Sassanid motif's body parts into the parts and investigated on their cultural value during ancient time in Persia and especially during Sassanid era.

#### 4.2.3 Sample 3



**Figure 4 Sassanid phoenix depicted on a wall panel, Chal Tarhan, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century, collected in Brithis Museum of London (Simorgh the Persian bird, 2009)**

The third sample of Sassanid phoenix, same as the previous samples, was depicted as an imaginative multi animal creature that seems to be a combination of birds and mammals. Archeologists estimated that it was depicted during Sassanid era. This sample also was depicted with carved lines in a circular frame. Sassanid artist for creating this motif carved the plaster to create a relief. In comparison with previous samples this one is depicted with deeper carved lines.

As already mention in the review part, Phoenix was a bird during ancient Persia that nested on the life tree that had any kind of healing seeds. This bird has mentioned in the Ancient literature books such as Shahnameh as a wisdom helpful and protective creature for humans.

Something that is different in this motif is the handwriting, due to the different artist who depicted this motif and also because of different materials that this motif depicted on it. Another difference in this phoenix with two others is about the small delicate motifs which are depicted on its tail and wing.

On the next parts of this research separately we investigate on each part of this Sassanid phoenix.

#### 4.2.4 Sample 4



**Figure 5 Sassanid Silk cloth with a phoenix design, 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> Century, collected in Jaam-e Jahan Namaa Bonyad Museum in Persia (Shafiee, 2007)**

Picture above shows another Sassanid phoenix motif which is the same as the previous samples seems to be an imaginative hybrid animal that looks like a combination of birds and mammal animals. Its head is depicted from profile side with short ears that looks like a predatory animal with open mouth and hanged down tongue. It has raised wings and huge wild tail.

Sassanid artist used curved and angular lines with regular thickness for creating this motif. The motif created in a circular composition and placed in a circular frame. Motif is depicted as a flat image with single color of warm brown. And the artist got benefited from whiteness color of silk fabric as a medium. So, the artist for showing variety of body parts materials, used different texture for each part. For instance, the artist through the repeating angular short lines created an imagination of feather texture and through the

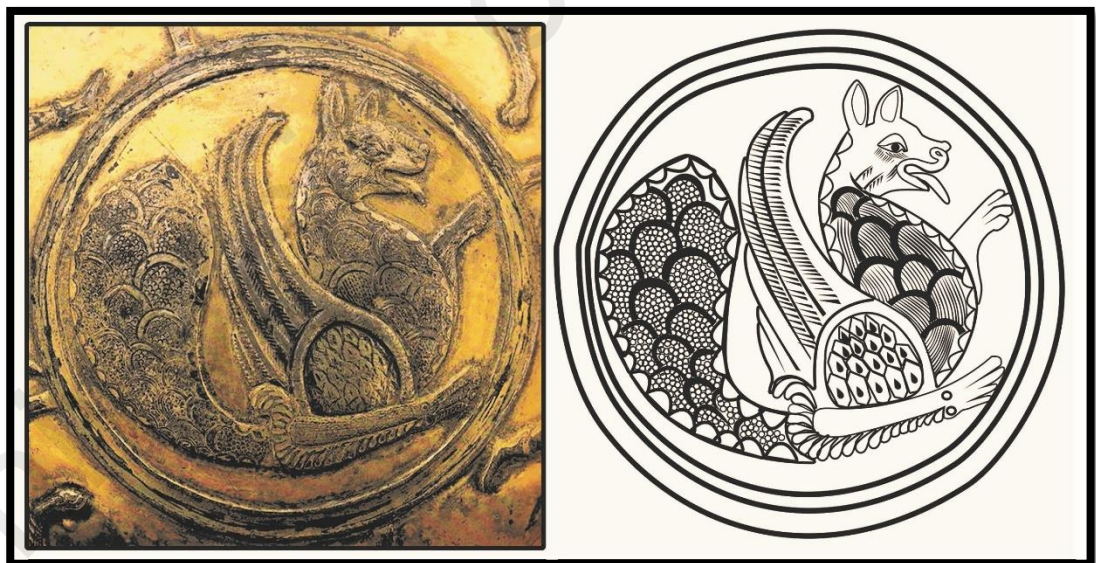


repeating curved or semi circulars in a regular long stretched elliptical shape, created phoenix tail in a flat space with no depth.

Sassanid phoenix depicted in an asymmetrical composition that seems the artist through the design of the huge tail and raised up wings and big open mouth and long sharp nails tried to show an emphasis on significance of this creature.

As already mentioned, Erwin Panofsky suggested after formal analysis of an artwork element to understand whether it is considered as an icon or not, one has to study about its cultural and religious aspects among the region which was created. So, due to this reason, this research would like to separate each body parts of Sassanid phoenix to investigate each part about mythological meaning and function.

#### 4.2.5 Sample 5



**Figure 6 Sassanid phoenix sample, Sassanid phoenix, depicted on a silver bowl, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Century AD, Hermitage Museum, Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia (Paintres.com, 2016)**

The picture on top shows another sample of Sassanid phoenix carved on a silver bowl that was discovered in Iran and transferred to the Hermitage Museum in Russia. As the same as other samples, this creature that is called Simorgh in Persian language is created

as a hybrid animal and depicted in the side profile view. This creature that looks like a combination of bird and mammals has not reported as a real creature in the real world, so it seems to be created through the artist imagination that contains a meaning or had a symbolic function.

It is obviously visible that the artist used curved lines in the phoenix design. And through the carving and repeating short angular and curved lines, created texture in different parts of phoenix body. The artist benefited from the metal bowl color.

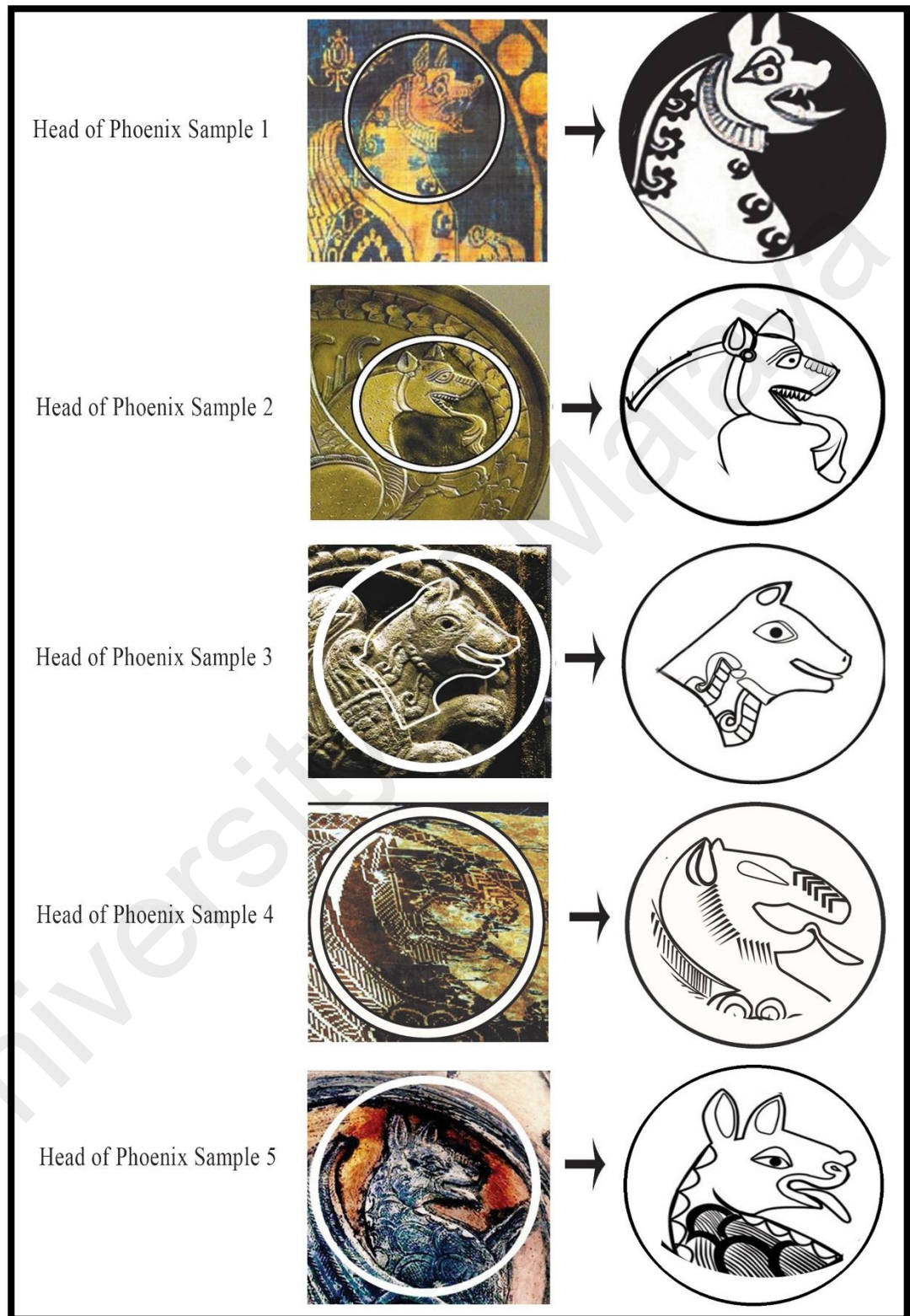
Phoenix motif is depicted in a circular frame that artist seems to tried to emphasize on the big tail that designed with overlapping and repeating texture. Another thing that seems interesting in this motif is the wings part. Because while the phoenix has a head with short and sharp ears and a hang down tongue that all seem to belong to a mammal animal, it has a wing that seems to be in flying scenes, because the wings look open. Its arms and claws look like a mammal animal too. In the following lines about each episode there will be examines separately.

#### **4.3 Result and Discussion**

In this part, the researcher demonstrate the similarities and differences alongside a discussion as well as a concluding remarks part at the end of the section.

### 4.3.1 Similarities

#### 4.3.1.1 Heads



**Figure 7 Sassanid phoenix heads of the samples**

Through the picture above, the researcher separated the heads of the ancient creature and compared it with different animal's head which had especial value during ancient Persia and especially during Sassanid dynasty. The researcher found several similarities between this creature head and dog head. The researcher chooses a side view of an illustrated dog head same as the intended ancient motif. Through the comparison of the illustrated dog head and the motif head, it seems the ears shape and the muzzle in the ancient motif are similar to the illustrated picture. Also, according to the habit of keeping the mouth open with a hang-out tongue from the mouth, it seems the artist inspired from dog nature to create and depict head of this creature.

Although Simorgh's head is similar to a wolf's head or other animals head, but because of the significance of dog character and top position of respect which considered to the dog as the same position of humans in the society in the Zoroastrianism religion (Asatrian & Arakelova, 2014, p. 110), and the suggestions from historians such as Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock in (The Ashghate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters, 2016) and Valerie L. Garver, Owen M. Phelan in the book of (Roman and Religion in the Medieval, World: Studied in Honor of Thomas F.X Noble, 2016) and Xinru Linu in her book (Silk and Religion) who advised the dog's head for Sassanid phoenix head, it seems to be a head of a dog.

In addition, with reference to Erwin Panofsky theory of iconography and iconology, that states: "every single artwork is a reflection of its culture" and mentions "every national and traditional appearance as a particular expression of certain necessary attitude of the social mind" Panofsky suggests "for finding answer refer to the hermeneutic problem: because the mind is both universal and particular" (Michael Hatt, 2006, p. 96). According to his theory, researcher referred to the Sassanid's holy books and found out that dog had had a sacred value on those eras for the people and people considered especial respect for dogs. So, as a result, dog can be considered as an iconic item which



used as a part of Sassanid phoenix or Simorgh motif. According to all those facts and suggestions and documents which is mentioned in the art history of Persia and ancient sacred book (Avesta), this research also suggests the identity of the dog's head as the phoenix head.



**Figure 8 Dog sculpture, from Persepolis, 5<sup>th</sup> C BC, photo by DSLEWIS on Flickr, (imgrum, 2016)**

The above picture shows a sculpture discovered in Persepolis that its head seems to be similar to the Sassanid phoenix head. In the pictures above it is shown the side view of sculpture head as well as Sassanid phoenix head. Through the comparing these pictures it would be clear that all these artworks have the big and opened eyes and prominent nose with an open mouth that in all the sharp teeth are clear. In contrast with the Phoenix that the artist showed the tongue in its mouth, in the sculpture the artist did not want to show the tongue.

According to Stav Dimiropoulos (2012):

“In the mind of most people, the equivalent of a dog’s smiling is when he is wagging his tail. But there is actually one canine facial expression that comes close to what we mean by smiling in humans. In this expression that comes close to what we mean by smiling in humans. In this expression, slightly opened jaws reveal the dog’s tongue lapping out over his front teeth. Frequently the eyes take on a teardrop shape at the same time, as if being pulled upward slightly at the outer corners. It is a casual expression that is usually seen when the dog is relaxed, playing, or interacting socially, especially with people. The moment any anxiety or stress is introduced, the dog’s mouth closes and you can no longer see the tongue” (Dimiropoulos, 2012, p. 1).

So, it seen that the Sassanid artist wanted to show a friendly relax dog that has a social relation with human. But the sculpture that created during the Achaemenid Empire shows a dog with a serious face.



**Figure 9 A Sassanid Silver and gold plate, with grapes tree, bird and dog motifs, 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century AD, discovered in Iran, Museum of Smithsonian in Washington, D.C - (Mandegaran, 2016)**

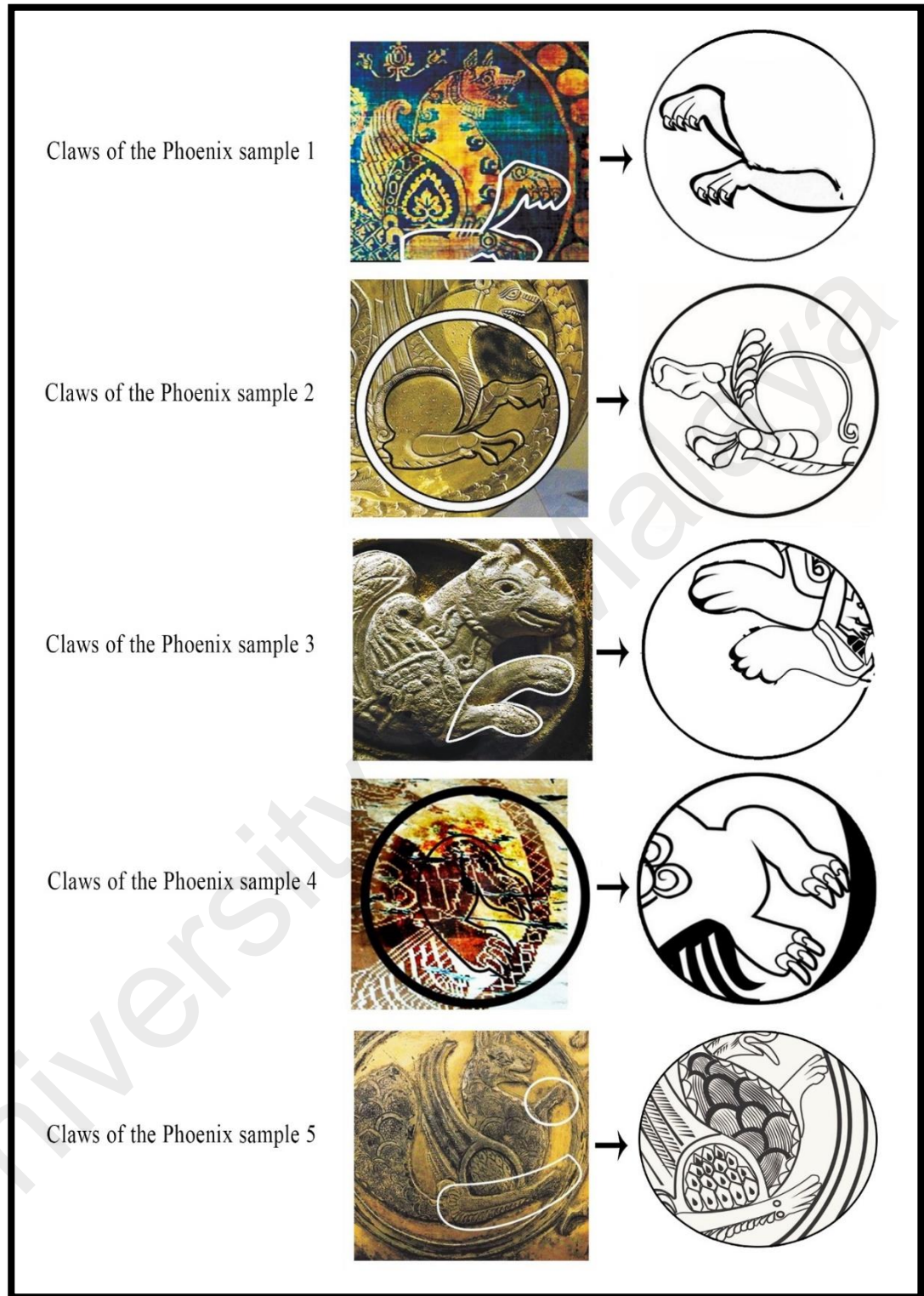
Picture above shows two dogs and birds are in a grapes garden while they are eating grapes and looks glad while birds are around. The motif seems that tries to show a friendly and safe world while dogs are around for protecting and gardening.



**Figure 10 This fifth century BC seal shows a Persian noblewoman playing a harp for her Maltese dog. The Phoenicians brought this dog from the island of Malta to Asia Minor (today's Turkey) where it became very popular with wealthy ancient Persians. (The Greeks in Asia, 2016)**

According to this ancient Stamp seal, it is seen that the Persians before Sassanid era were interested in dogs as a precious animal and used to care of them and even had respectful behavior with them, as it is clear in the stamp seal image that the lady is playing music for her dog. So, it is seen that the Sassanid artist inspired from the Persian ancestor religion and culture and reflected in the artwork. So, it seems that the Sassanid phoenix's head had an iconic value according Ervin Panofsky theory of Iconography and Iconology. It represented the Sassanid Empire as the guardian of society who is dependable and trustworthy.

#### 4.3.1.2 Claws



**Figure 11 Sassanid Phoenix claws of the samples**

The picture above shows the similarity of Sassanid Phoenix claws and lion paws. The composition of the fingers and nails and emphasis on the powerful paws with long sharp nails shows that the artist tried to create a sense that phoenix has powerful paws like a

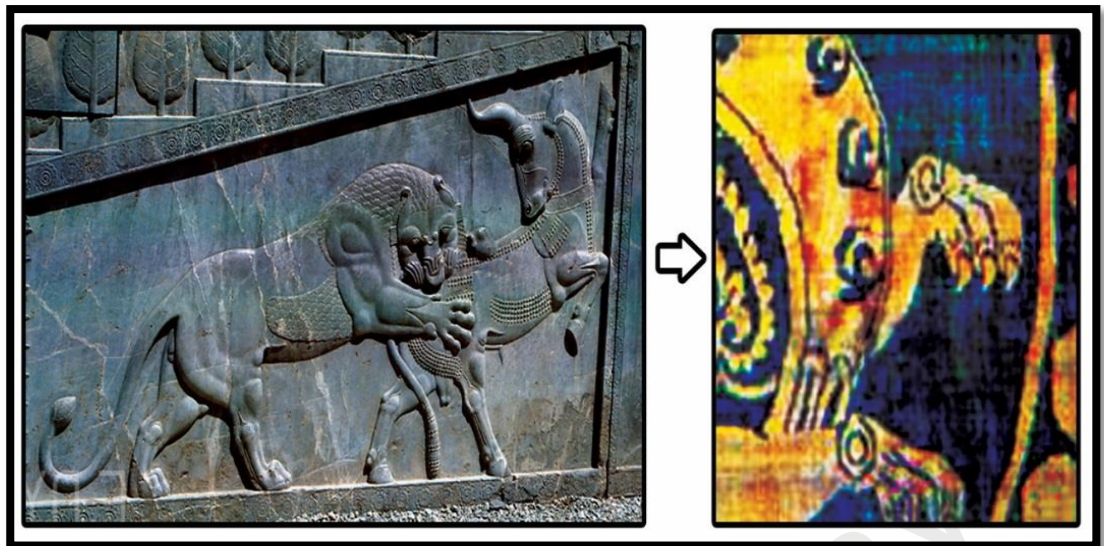


strong lion. Historians such as Valerie L. Garver, Owen M. Phelan in their book (Roman and Religion in the Medieval, World: Studied in Honor of Thomas F.X Noble 2016) and Brenda Rosen in (The Mythical Creatures Bible: The Definitive Guide to Legendary Beings 2009) and The Shahnameh of Firdausi: volume 5 translated by Arthur George Warner, Edmond Warner at 2013) who suggested lion paws for the Sassanid phoenix.

Through the observing antiques and reliefs which was created during ancient Persia until Sassanid era, it is obvious that the lion had an important value for those people. Also from biology of animal aspects during ancient times, Iran had a large number of lions and at the current period the Persian lion has extinct. The artworks that is remained from ancient times are the proof for this claim.

Erwin Panofsky's theory advices for recognizing an icon to investigate on cultural and sacred values of an item in the society and religion of an especial era. According to these investigates which the researcher did, lion is one of the animals which was widely used during ancient period in Persia that performed and displayed in many kinds of arts such as sculptures and depicted as a relief and etc. Also in ancient royal culture of Iran, hunting lion was one of the standards and a sign for a man who was going to be chosen as a king to show he has enough power for government.

Also, lion was used as a religious symbolism in Mithras or the God of Sun during Sassanid era, that according to this aspect, Sassanid phoenix claws are taken from another icon, and it seems the Sassanid artist inspired from lion icon for creating phoenix. (Soudavar, 2015, p. 51). According to these evidences, the researcher also proposes the lion paws for one of the body parts of Sassanid phoenix.



**Figure 12 The picture on the left side is an example of lion motif that depicted during ancient Persia 550-330BC (wikipedia, 2016)**

Picture shows a bas-relief in Persepolis depicting a lion eating a bull. The lion has strong claws and nails which uses them for hunting that they seem to be similar to the Sassanid phoenix. This iconography is typical of ancient Iranians. Photo was taken about 1976 in Persepolis, Fars State, Iran. By Fabien Dany. According to these evidences, it seems the Sassanid artist was inspired by the lion for creating Sassanid phoenix claws. Refer to picture above on the right side.



**Figure 13 Lion and Persian kings (pinterest, 2017)**

The left picture above shows an Achaemenid king while he is battling with a winged lion with powerful muscular claws. Archeologists believe that this relief belongs to Darius the great, the king of Achaemenid. And, the picture on the right shows Sassanid king on the lion hunting scene. According to these motifs it seems that the culture of hunting lions since Achaemenid continued till Sassanid era and battling with lions was sign of king's power.





**Figure 14 Artaxerxes III who was one of the Achaemenid kings, 351 BC, Anahita the God of water riding the Lion that was a symbol of God of sun or Mithras, so far, the oldest Lion and Sun insignia ever discovered in Neyshabur, Hermitage Museum- (Irane Ayandeh, 2016)**

Iranian lion was always considered as a symbol of courage, braveness and pride that are visible in the remained and discovered ancient artworks such as reliefs, pottery metal objects, governmental signs and seals. Sun, also is a sign of “Eazadmehr” the angel who constables of friendship and romance. Iranian poets and writers have also repeatedly reminded of the lion and sun (Hasanzadeh, 2016).

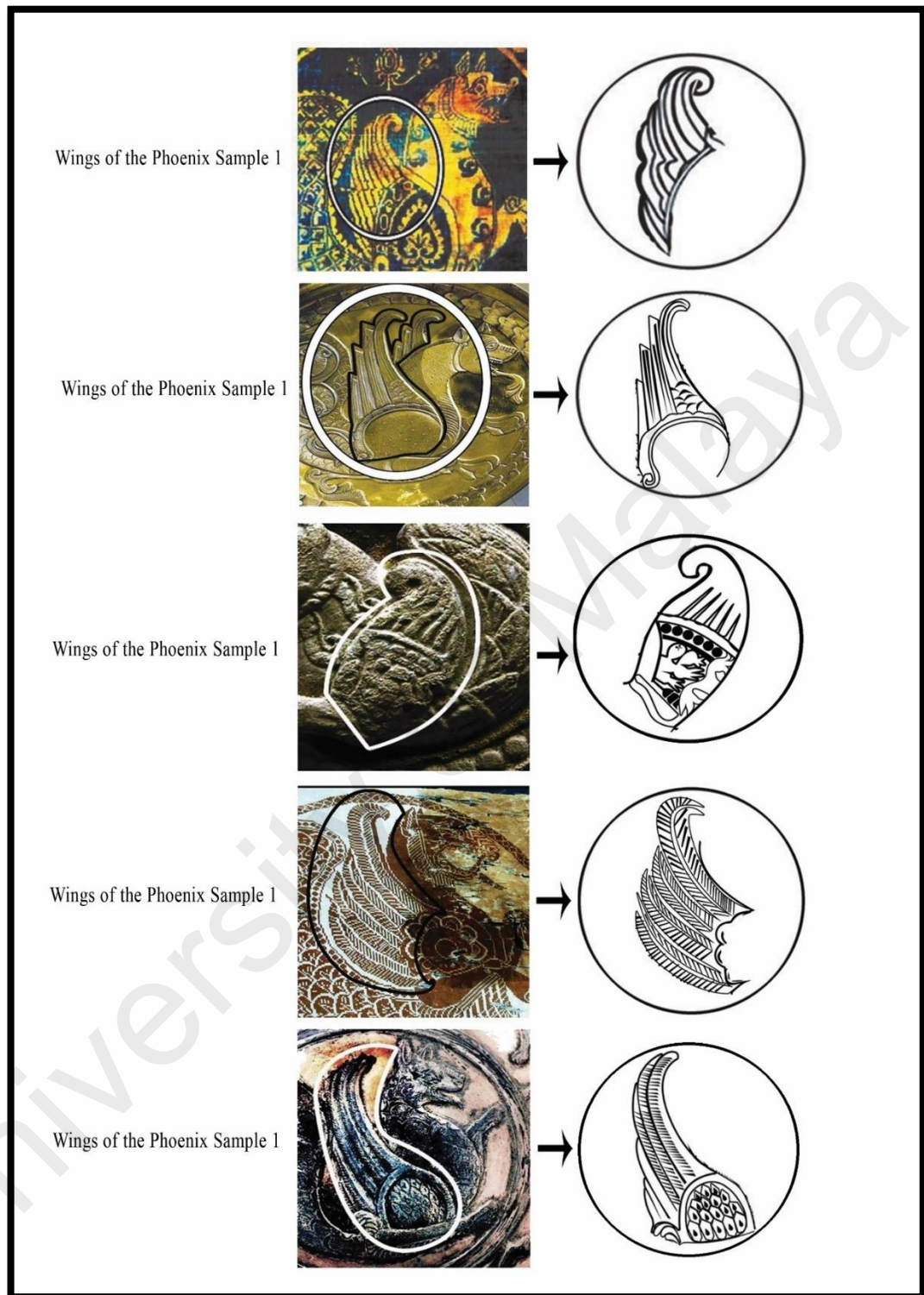
So, according to this picture and explanations, it seems that the lion with the significance of governmental and religious symbolism was placed in the composition of Sassanid phoenix body to show this imaginative creature with both courage and holiness adjective.



**Figure 15 Sassanid silver bowl, king as lion-hero, 5<sup>th</sup> century, British Museum, London, (Sassanid, 2016)**

In the other aspect, lion is mentioned as a symbol of bravery, courage, royalty and generosity in the Persian literature (Seruij, pp. 23,25). So, because in the Shahnameh it is mentioned about phoenix as a generous creature which used to help others, these honors are more close to the phoenix as an imaginative creature. And it seems that Sassanid artist included the lion claws as a powerful creature which battle with the forces of evils to protect humans.

#### 4.3.1.3 Wings



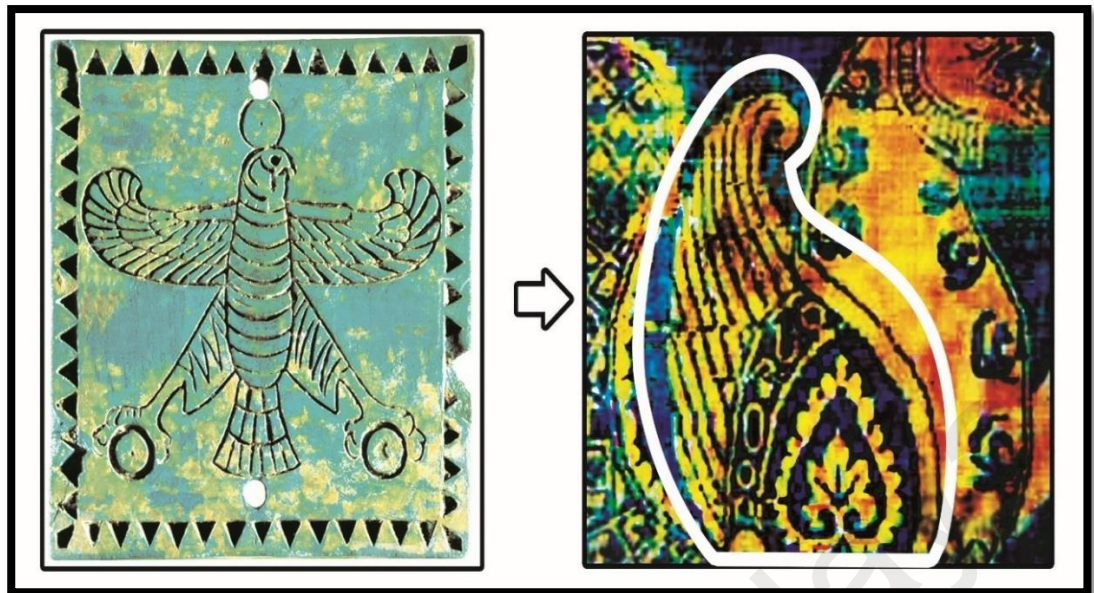
**Figure 16 Sassanid phoenix wings of the samples**

Picture above shows the similarity of Sassanid phoenix wings that inspired from real eagle wings. Although the wings can be similar to other birds but because of the significance of eagle during ancient Persia and Sassanid dynasty which was explained in

the review part before, and the suggestions from historians such as Enrich Brauer in his book (*The Jew of Kurdistan*, 1993), and George Stanley Faber who wrote the book (*The Origin of Pagan Idolatry Ascertained from Historical Testimony and Circumstantial Evidence*, Volume 1, 1816) which mentioned about similarity and significance of eagle during Sassanid dynasty (Faber, 1816, p. 432). Alice Mead, another historian in her book (*Dawn and Dusk*, 200) also has the same idea about eagle wings which used for Sassanid phoenix depiction. For example, eagle sign has known as the head of state and power in ancient Persia and Persian kings used a golden eagle as their flag and this bird was linked to the royal Persian power. Eagle was a sign of victory which can be seen in a relief of sacred Ahura Mazda that also used eagle wings.

Also, according to Erwin Panofsky which suggested for surveying and studying about iconographic value of an icon, one should refer to the culture problems during the related era, the researcher has referred to the historical and sacred books which mentioned about significance of eagle during ancient time in Iran such as Matthew P. Canepa (*The Two Eyes of the Earth: Art and Ritual of Kingship between Rome and Sassanid Iran*, 2009) and Douglas Newton in the book (*The Pacific Islands, Africa, and the Americas*) who explained about value of eagle in Sassanid culture which is already mentioned in the review part. Also, according to Erwin Panofsky, the sacred value of eagle during Sassanid dynasty is that they used it for depicting the Ahura Mazda which was related to the hermeneutic problems (Canepa, 2009, p. 95). In the Sassanid culture, eagle picture used for the headband and kings' crowns which had especial meanings that has been explained in the review before (Newton, 1987, p. 15).





**Figure 17 Achaemenid flag with eagle motif, 500-480 BC, (allposters, 2016)**

Picture shows the first flag of Iran was likely introduced by father of Iran; “Cyrus the Great”. Xenophon (Greek historian, he fought with Cyrus “The king of Iran”) saw also the flag and he said: “And the world went down the lines, Eyes on the standard and steady marching!” The standard was a golden eagle, with open wings, born aloft on a long spear-shaft, and to this day such is the standard of the Persian King.” It seems Sassanid artist inspired from Achaemenid flag for creating Sassanid flag. (Xenophon, 2010, p. 30).



**Figure 18 Ahura Masda symbol, that means in Avestan language “Wise Lord” also spelled Ormizd or Ormazd, supreme God in ancient Iranian religion, especially Zoroastrianism, the religious system of the Iranian prophet Zarathustra, 480 BCE-470 BCE, Greek name Zoroaster. The relief from Persepolis, Fars province, Iran, 550-330 BC (Livius, 2016)**

As already mentioned in the review part, in the Zoroastrianism religion, Ahura Mazda symbol has been represented as an eagle with wings. Wing on the human and animal body was a symbol of goodness, power and protection during ancient Persia. Zoroastrians used to depict this motif on the top of Fire Temples. Wings give a spiritual and extraterrestrial appearance and meaning to the symbols and motifs during ancient time in Persia that it was among the sculpture and symbols even before Sassanid dynasty. It seems Sassanid artist was inspired by previous ancestors to creating the Sassanid phoenix.

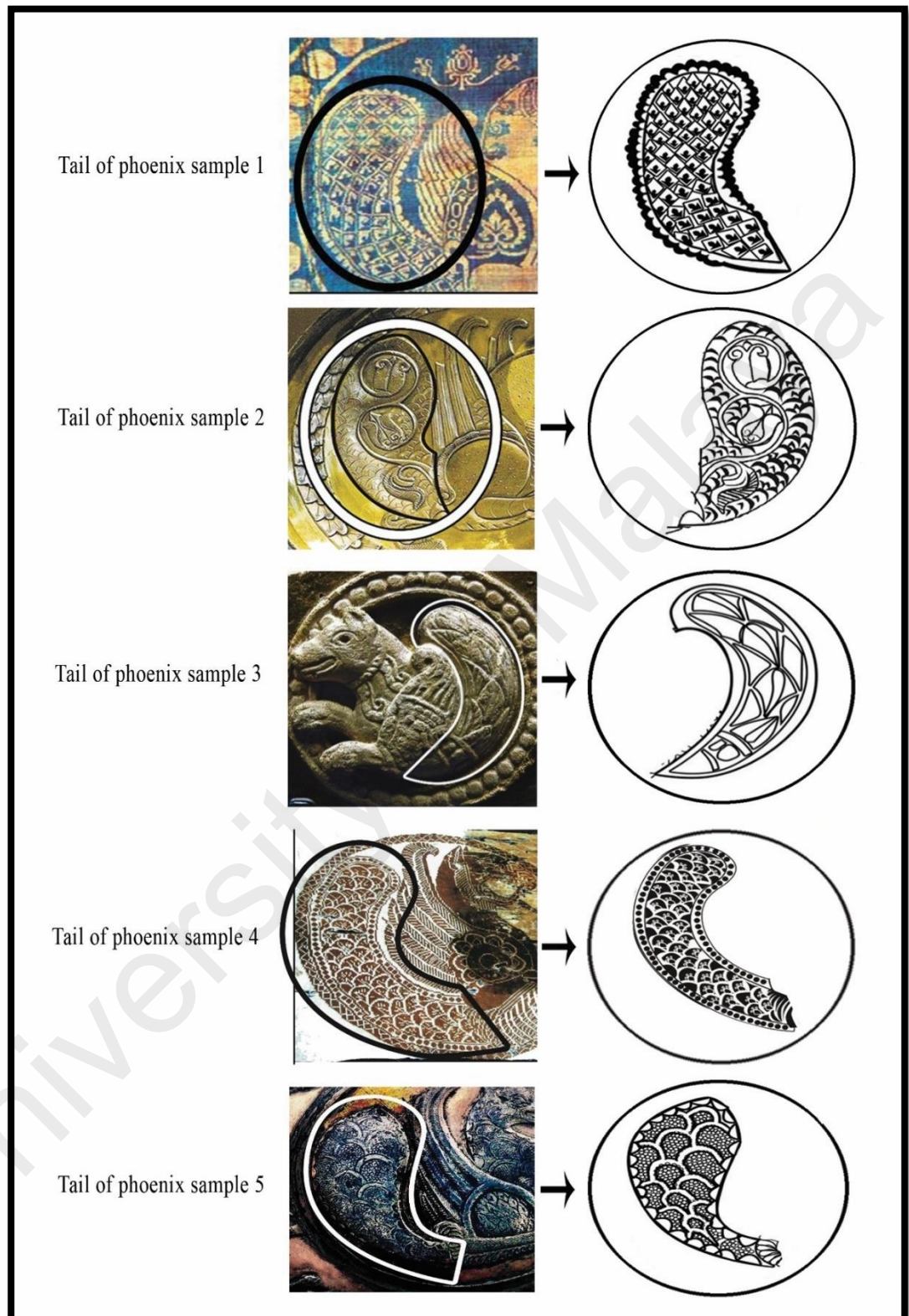
So, because eagle wings were considered in the religious sculpture and symbols, it seems that it has a value as an icon, because according to Erwin Panofsky’s theory of Iconography and Iconology that already explained in the review part, Panofsky mentioned for recognizing a symbol as an icon we have to study on cultural and religious function. The wings of the eagle represented the Sassanid Empire as victorious over neighboring powers.



**Figure 19 Motif shows an eagle that catch a snake in its claws, Tappe Yahya, 6000-9000 BC. Kerman. Persia (Hall J. , 2010, p. 68)**



#### 4.3.1.4 Tails



**Figure 20 Sassanid phoenix tails of the Samples**

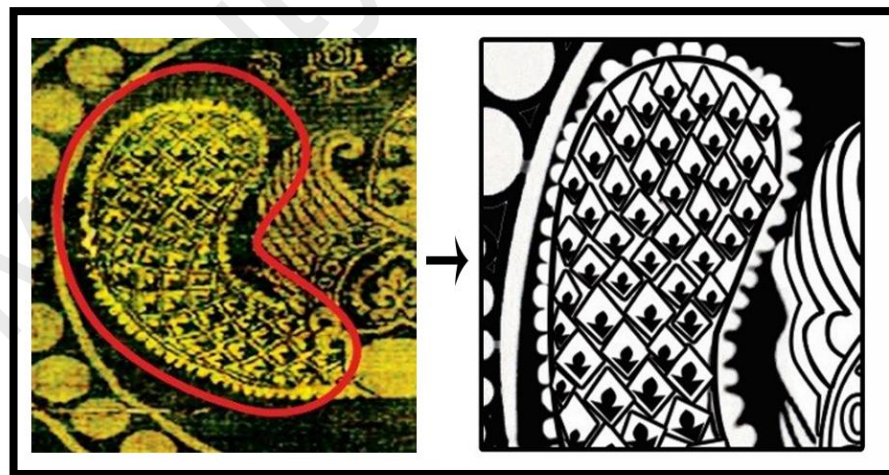
Picture above shows the similarity of Sassanid phoenix tail and the peacock tail. As mentioned, peacock was imported from India (Dixon, 1828, p. 317). And for the proof of



this idea the researcher found a peacock motif that depicted on the textile with a similar tail of Sassanid phoenix tail.

The peacock's splendor represents divinity, royalty, beauty, and love in Hinduism, the bird is the mount of Kartikeya, good of war, while Buddhists equate the peacock with compassion and vigilance. Its tail markings have eyes, star, and solar symbols. The strutting male peacock is associated with vanity (Kathryn Wilkinson, Vicky Sort., 2008, p. 60).

According to the general shape of the Sassanid phoenix which is visible in the picture above, the phoenix has a long flat wide tail, with division of lozenges shapes that in each one of lozenge a spot of black color is depicted with a clear shape that repeated inside all the lozenge shapes of the phoenix tail motif. It seems the Sassanid artist was inspired from peacock feather and according to the graphical rules the artist created a geometrical motif with two negative colors as a tail.



**Figure 21 Similarity of peacock feathers with geometrical motifs on phoenix tail, (wallpapercave, 2016)**

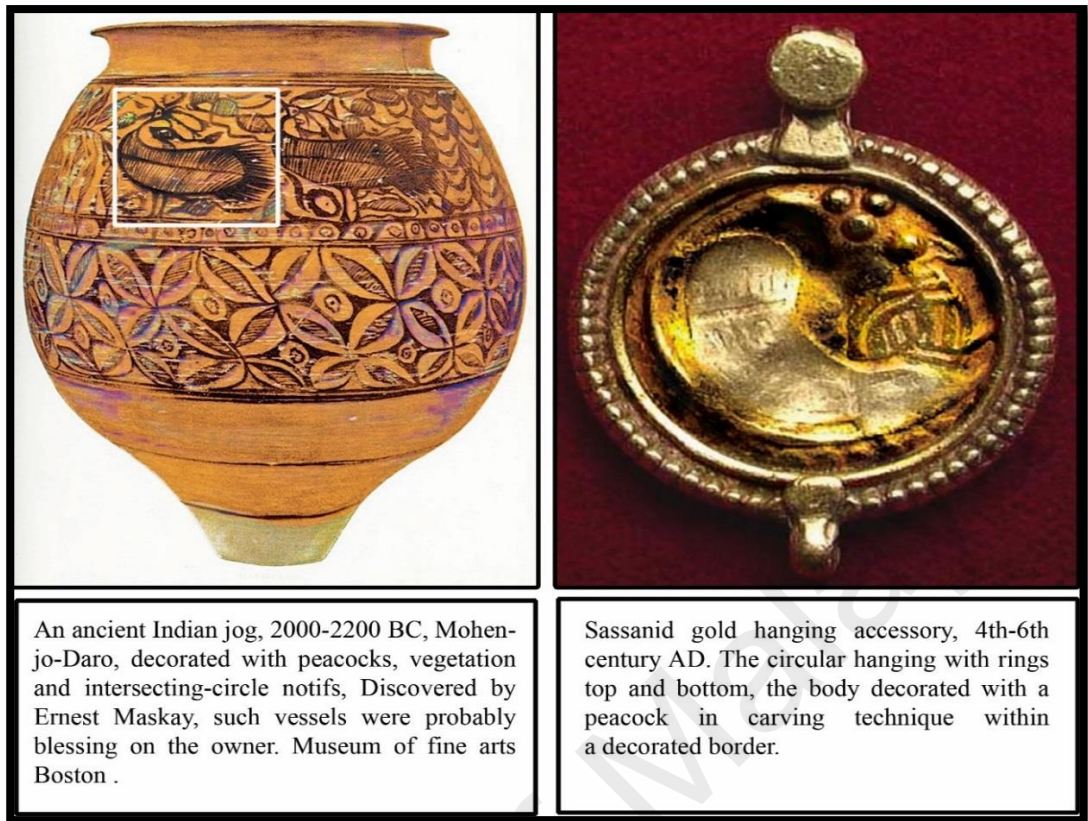
The picture above shows the similarity of the Sassanid phoenix tail motif with lozenges shapes and real peacock feathers on its tail.

With reference to the suggestions from historians such as Esther Copely and T. Dixon in the book of (Scripture Natural History for youth, Volume 2, 1828) and (Magical mythical creatures, 2001) by D. J. and another historian named professor Xinru Liu also explained in her texts (Silk and Religion, 1998) that explained about cultural and religious values in the Persian culture it seems that Sassanid artist had used peacock tail which was an iconic animal during Sassanid era, as a part of phoenix body (Werness, 2006, p. 320).

It seems that the Sassanid artist was inspired by the Indian art and transferred the peacock with his\her Persian hand and reflected the peacock with Persian concept of symbolism in creating phoenix motif.

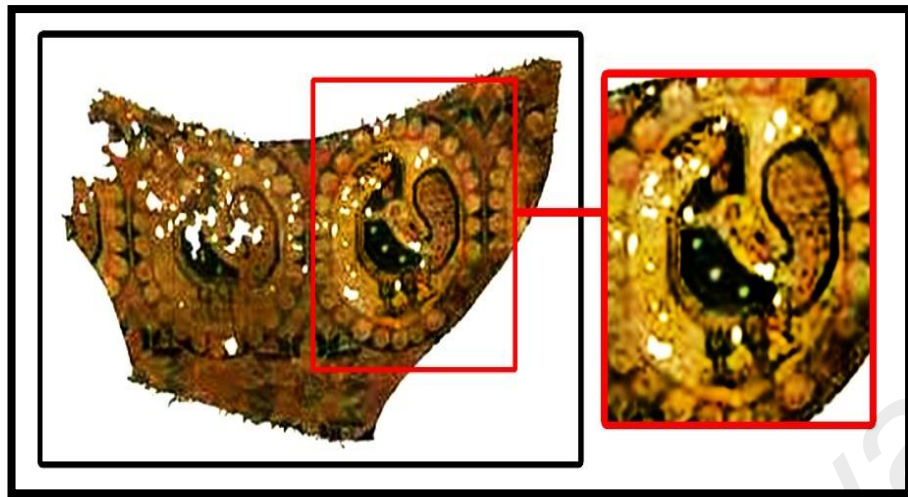


**Figure 22 Sassanid stamp seals, a peacock in right profile, standing, Metropolitan Museum of Art (Brunner, 1978, p. 108)**



**Figure 23 Ancient Indian jog (Kenoyer, 1998, p. 231), Sassanid gold hanging (SACKLER, 2016)**

Indian jog Pictures above shows the similarity of two peacock motifs which depicted during different eras on ancient times. As mentioned peacock is a national Indian bird influenced to the Persia. According to the picture above it seems that the Sassanid artist was inspired from ancient Indian peacock motifs and transferred his\her inspiration in creating phoenix.



**Figure 24 Persian textile with peacock motif, 7<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> century**



**Figure 25 A Persian metalwork with peacock motifs, North of Luristan in Iran, 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennia BC, Louvre Museum (Mirrazavi, 2011)**

Pictures above shows two examples of ancient Persian peacock motifs that their tail designs are similar to the Sassanid phoenix tail. Among many Sassanid artworks, peacock motif mostly could be seen on the Sassanid seals and for the palace decoration. They were appreciated for their aesthetic value (Açıkyıldız, 2014, p. 78). The peacock motifs represented the beauty and splendor of the Sassanid Empire.

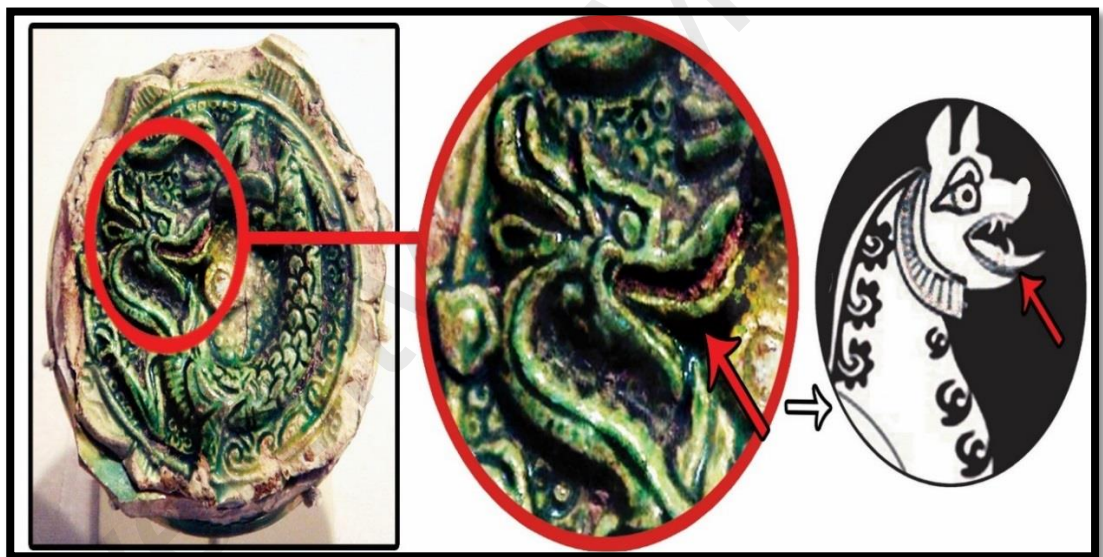


### 4.3.2 Differences

#### 4.3.2.1 Phoenix Tongues

But something that is emphasized in the sample 1 is the different shape of the tongue with the real form of a dog's tongue. In this sample, the tongue tends to the upward while usually dog's tongue hanging down.

In this case, the research investigates on different cultures which had relation with Iran during ancient times especially in Sassanid dynasty to find out whether there are any artifacts with similar properties from other countries which shows cultural influences to Iran during ancient time or no?



**Figure 26 Tang Dynasty dragon, 7<sup>th</sup>- early 8<sup>th</sup> century, Iran- (wikimedia, 2016)**

The picture on the top left side shows a Chinese dragon carved on a pottery which was found during excavated in Iran. The age of this pottery is estimated about 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century, as the same time when Sassanid Empire was ruling in Iran. As already mentioned in the review part, Sassanid dynasty had friendly commercial and diplomatic relations with ancient Chinese Empires at the time.

In a closer look to the ancient Chinese dragons and ancient Sassanid phoenix face, there is a notable feature which is visible in their both tongues. Both tongues tend to the up side

in the same way. Through the consideration of cultural and commercial relations between ancient Chinese Empire and Sassanid Empire, it seems the Sassanid artist was inspired by the Chinese influences which is evident in the Sassanid phoenix tongue. Also, both dragon and phoenix are two mythical imaginative creatures which had important and positive value in the cultural aspects during the same ancient time in both country.

“Dragon is a national symbol in China which has different meanings. Historically, the dragon is the symbol of power and positive influences and luck they used in daily language and used dragon word for blessing and wishing good luck for each other” (Illia, Balmer, & González del Valle Brena, 2013, p. 63).

Something that emphasized in the Sample 2 is the long tongue that looks longer than the normal size. The artist used curved line for drawing its shape. From the beginning, the tongue is narrower than the tip of the tongue. The tongue shape looks different with a normal dog's tongue shape, and it seems to be similar to a leaf motif. Through the comparing different ancient motifs from ancient Persia and other countries that had cultural and diplomatic relation with ancient Persia, it seems “acanthus leaves” motifs that are national Roman leaves have the most similarity to the Sassanid phoenix tongue in this sample. Picture below shows clearly about the similarities.

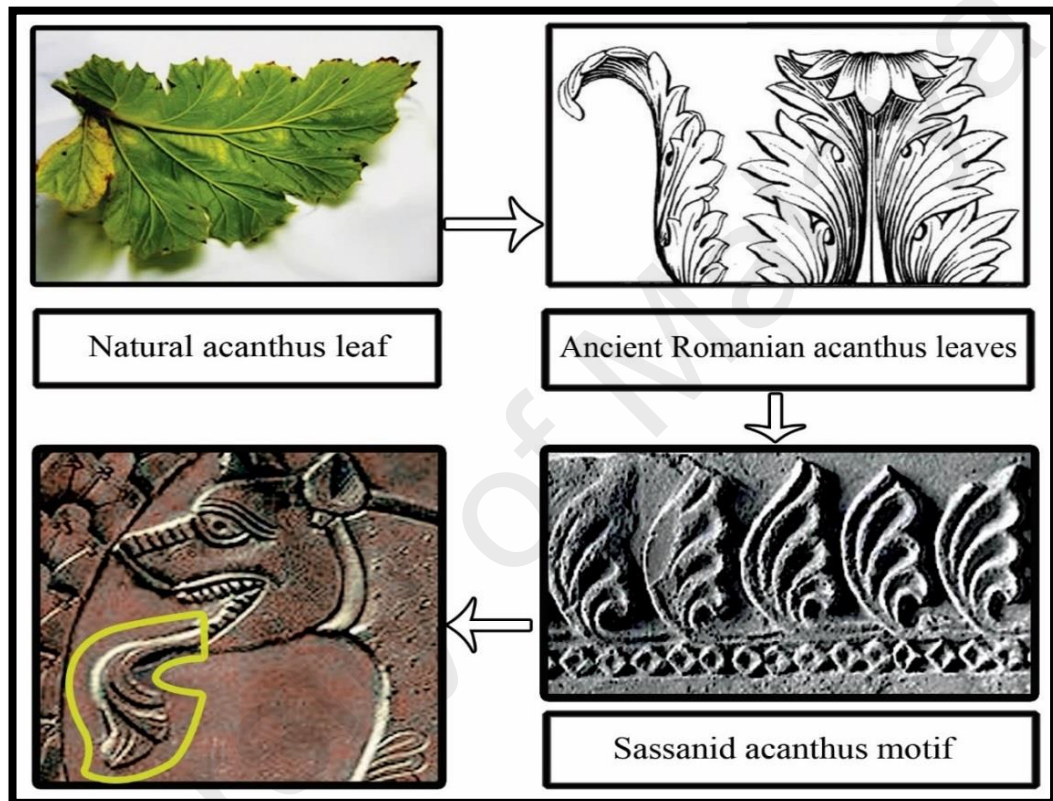


**Figure 27 Similarity of Romanian acanthus leaf and phoenix tongue**

According to the review part that it is mentioned about influences from Roman and Greece art that were gradually improved by Persian artists and transferred into a completely Persian feature seems the Sassanid artist was inspired by the Romanian and Greek art and reflected his\her inspiration in to phoenix design especially the tongue part. (Ayatollahi, 2002, p. 147). Through the comparing these two motifs both motifs at the beginning part are narrower and through a stretched arc reach to the end part that in the both motifs were divided into the three parts. The first two parts tend to bend into the main body of figure and the lower part or the third part tend out, the opposite direction of two others.

As a decorative motif in Greek art, the acanthus had a long history dates back at least to Classical period. The earliest representations appeared to have imitated wild acanthus (*acanthus spinosus/spinosa*). The more luxuriant garden variety, *acanthus mollis* ("barefoot" or "bear's breech"), became popular in later Greek and Roman art, notably in sacral and funerary contexts. The use of *acanthus* on sepulchral stela, as represented on fifth-century B.C.E. Attic white *lekythoi* (a type of vase for storing oil), supports the view that this plant was considered to have a potent prophylactic or apotropaic value. Like

thistles and other thorny vegetation, the wild spiny variety of acanthus was associated with the powers of the netherworld. The prophylactic or apotropaic aspect of the acanthus was probably carried over to the non-spiny, more decorative garden variety, *acanthus mollis*. As a perennial plant, acanthus symbolizes the notion of regeneration and, by extension, the concept of immortality (Pollini, 2012, pp. 272-273).

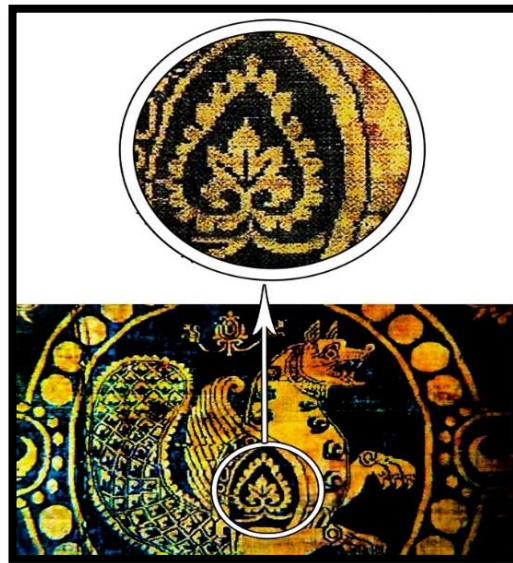


**Figure 28** Picture shows the revolution and process that Romanian and Greek artists inspired from acanthus leaves and use it in their artworks then the Persian artist inspired from them and improved it on hands and transfer acanthus motif in the Persian and Sassanid artworks.

So, it is estimated that acanthus leaves had similar specifications that already mentioned about Tree of Life during ancient Persia such as; healing, and immortality and ability to reject the negative evils around an environment and attract the luck and considered a sacred leaf.



#### 4.3.2.2 Vegetal Motifs



**Figure 29 Vegetarian motifs depicted on phoenix wing**

Picture above shows the veggie motifs which is depicted on the Sassanid phoenix wing of the Sample 1. It is explained about Avesta and Shahnameh books which both, mentioned about phoenix's nest that it was on the top of an especial sacred tree called "Gaokerana and Home" with all seeds which was useful for curing any kind of disease and people believed swallowing those seeds helps to being immortality. And it is explained while the phoenix was moving its wings on that tree seeds and leaves started to fall down and mixed with the water and moved through the wind. (Warren, 2013). During the period of ancient Iran and also Sassanid era Gaokerana and Home tree both were famous in culture and religious beliefs that before explained more about that in the review part.

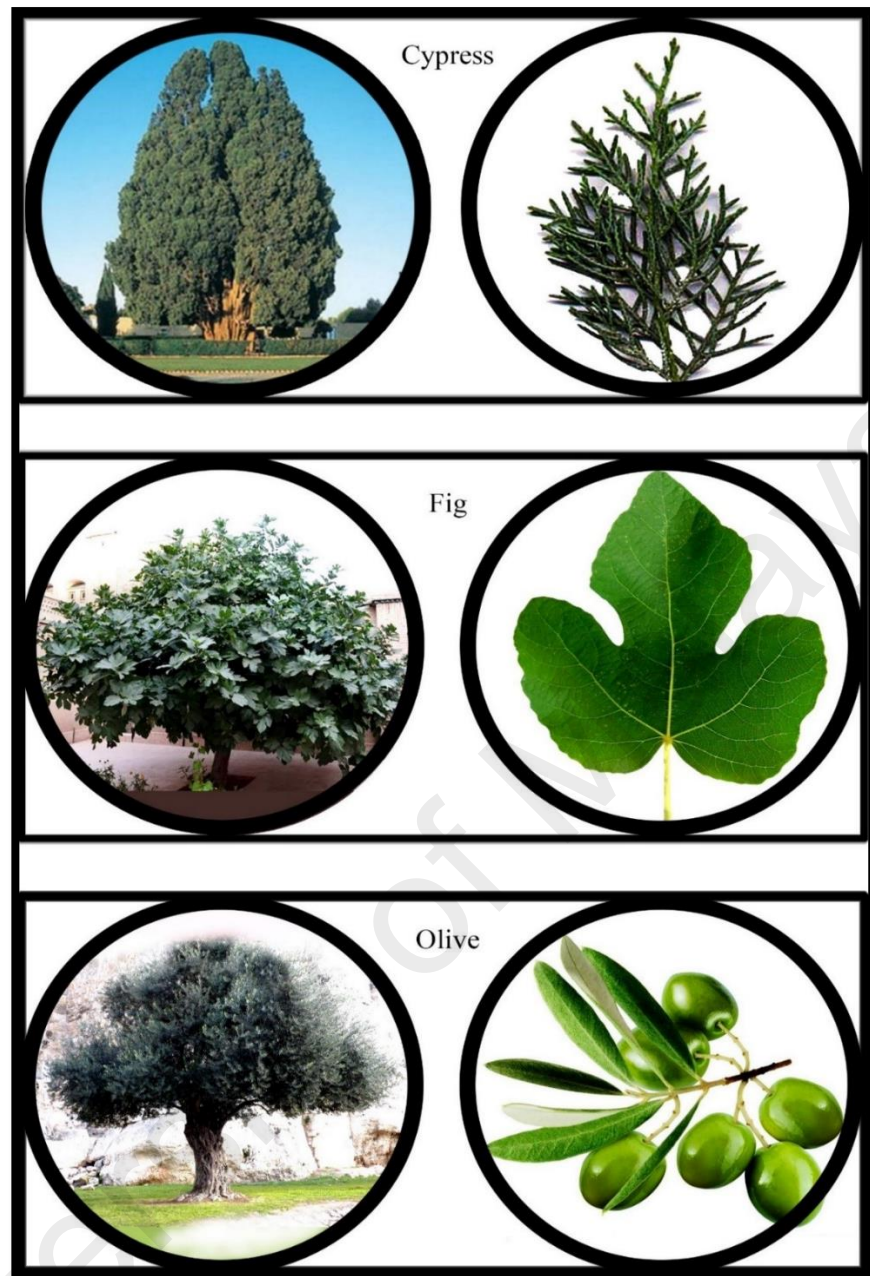
Although their name and function were mentioned several times in Avesta (the ancient holy book of Sassanid era of Zoroastrianism religion) and explained in the historical books by historians but there is no image or any exact explanation about the real shape of those plants and their leaves. However; because of the medicinal properties significance of those plants that mentioned in the holy book of Avesta and historical books this research also estimate these motifs are related to those sacred trees.

In addition, according to review part of this research that is before explained, during ancient times of Iran depend on the different religions of different groups, people considered especial plants and tree as a symbolism of life in their beliefs, those trees which identified and mentioned in the art historical books such as “Iranian mythology, Hindi mythology, and symbolism by Abolghasem Dadvar” and “Dr. Windischeniann in The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art, 1864”. They are fig tree, cedar, olive and sycamore which considered sacred in Sassanid era.

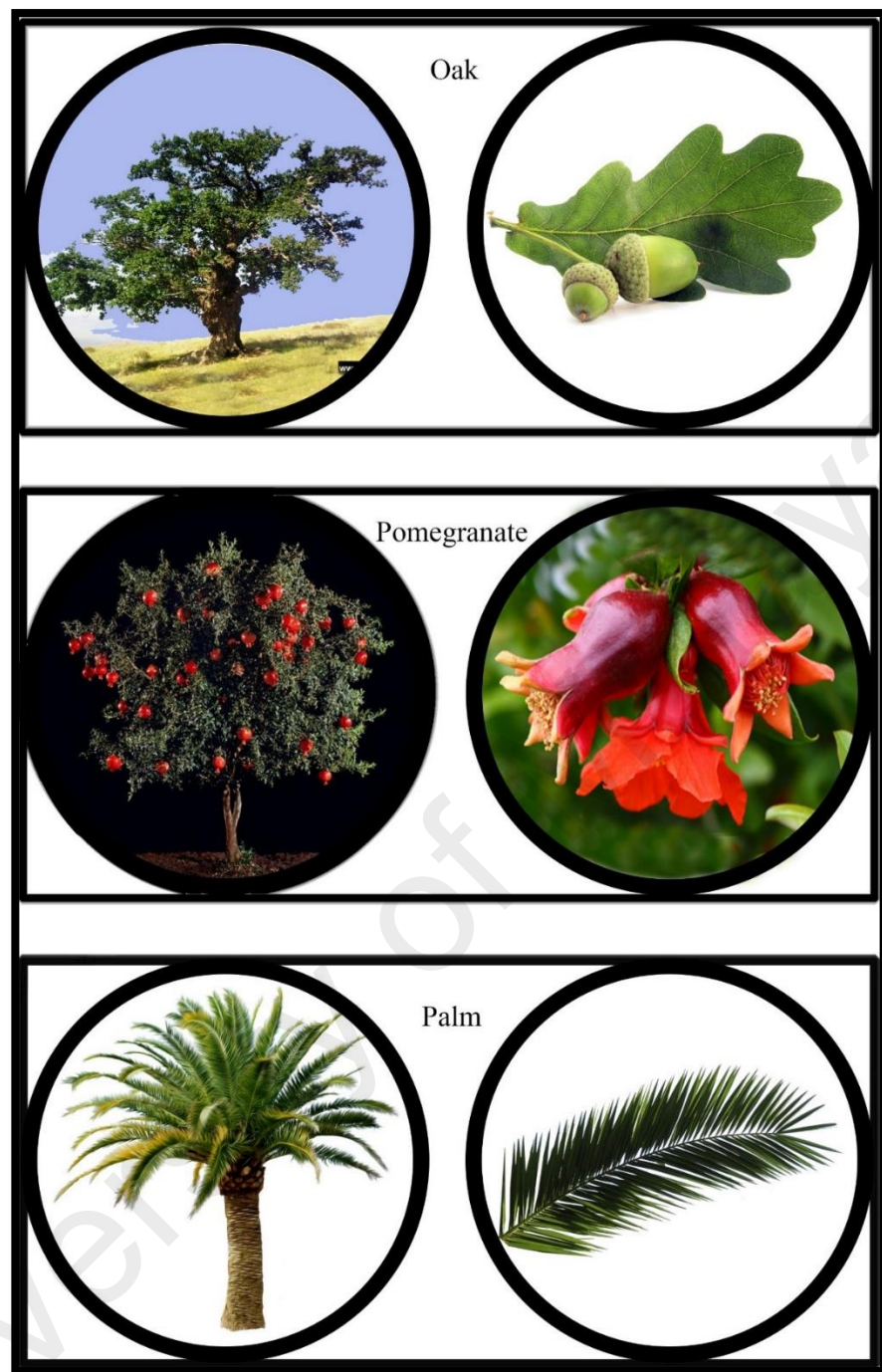
However, still there is no opinion about these veggie motifs which was depicted on the Sassanid phoenix body but the researcher, according to Erwin Panofsky’s suggestions of critical iconographical method investigates on formal shapes and forms of these motifs to find some similarities among the real plants which had cultural values during ancient time in Persia.

As before mentioned in the review part, some of the trees and plants were considered sacred during Sassanid era, such as: palm and palmate, fig, cedar, olive and sycamore, lotus flower, vine, pomegranate and Oak. First of all, the researcher has a quest on the general shapes and forms of those planets to find some similarities between those plants and the motifs to proof whether those motifs had had any relation with mentioned sacred plants in the art history of Sassanid dynasty or not?

Through the pictures below, you can see the original pictures and forms of sacred plants which mentioned in ancient Sassanid era that considered as sacred plants during this era. Then, the research is going to study and compare the veggie motifs that depicted in the Sassanid phoenix motif and the real forms of plants which mentioned as sacred before.

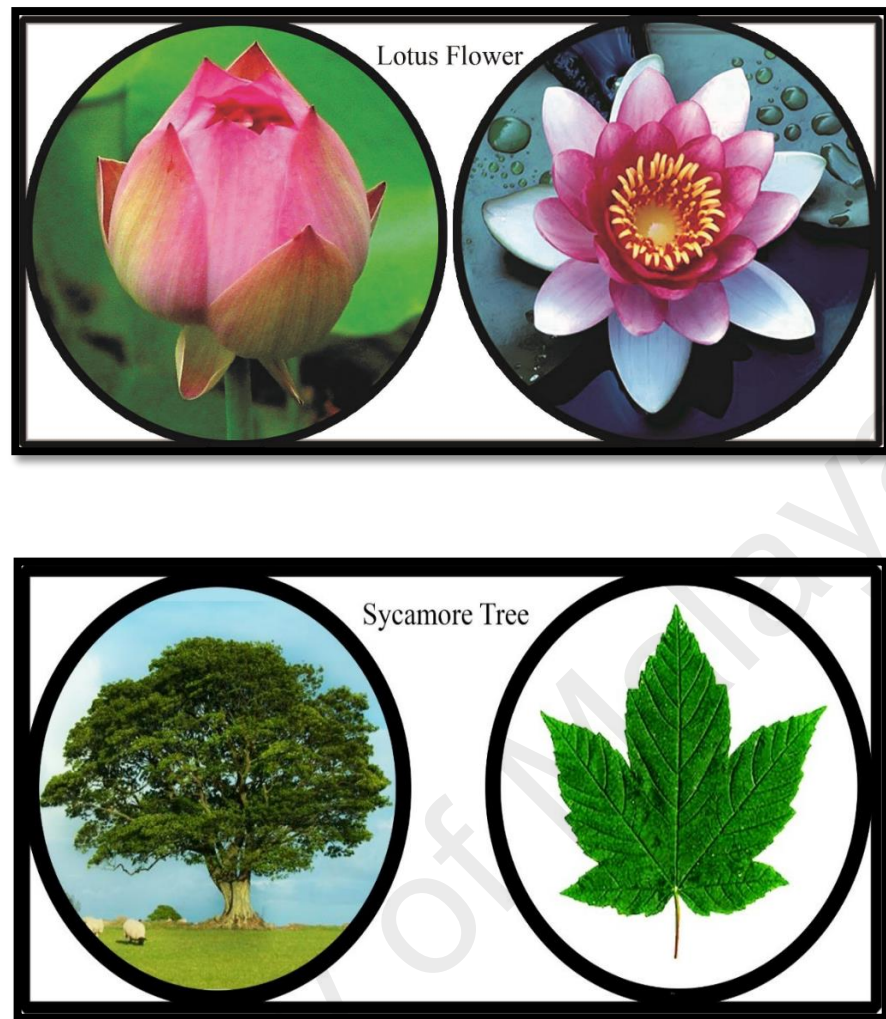


**Figure 30 Sacred plants during Sassanid era (Wikipedia, 2016), (Wikipedia, Cupressus arizonica, 2017), (Golvagiah, 2013), (Fig Leaf Pictures, Images and Stock Photos, 2013), (Keto Pantry - Olive Oil, 2016)**



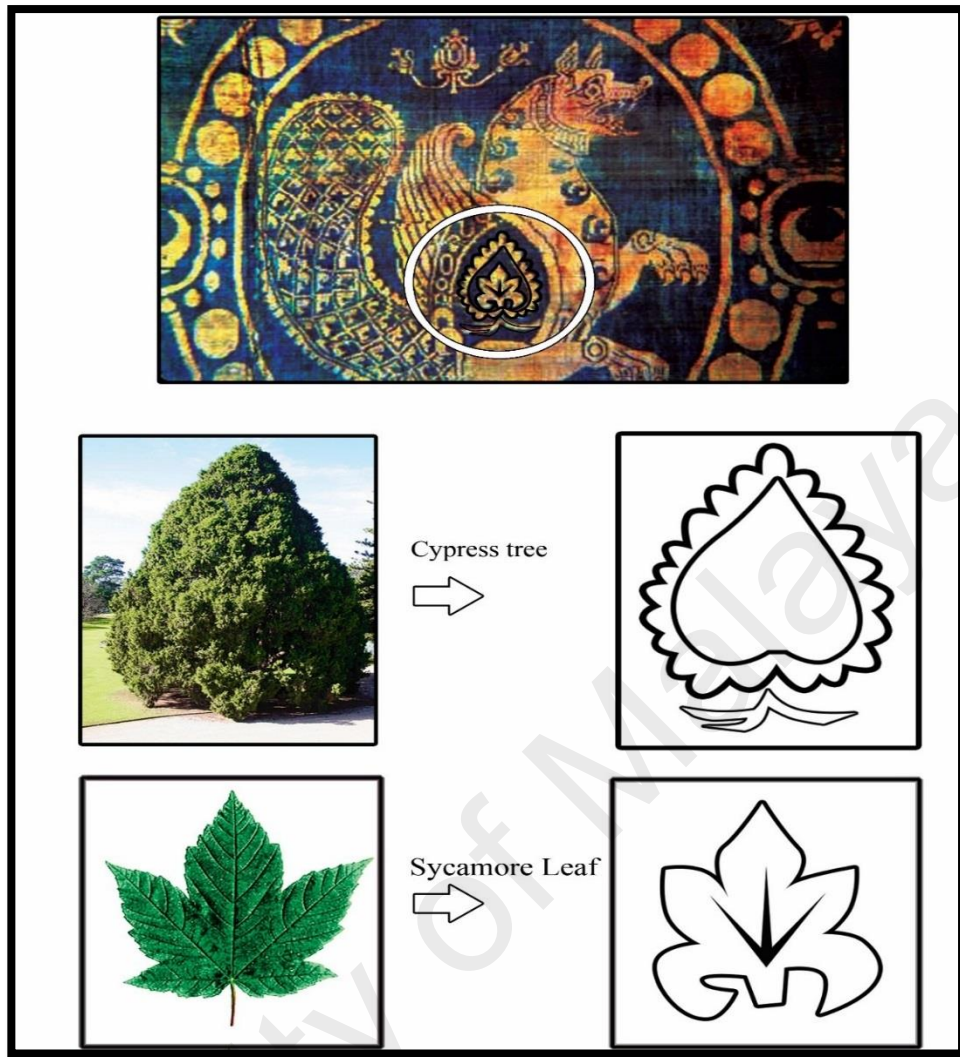
**Figure 31 Sacred plants during Sassanid era (homian.ir, 2016) (ACORN, 2017), (Long, 2017), (Kruse, 2011), (Fernando, 2017),**





**Figure 32 Sacred plants during Sassanid era (Molinaro, 2017), ( Vitale, 2014), (Riordan, 2017)**

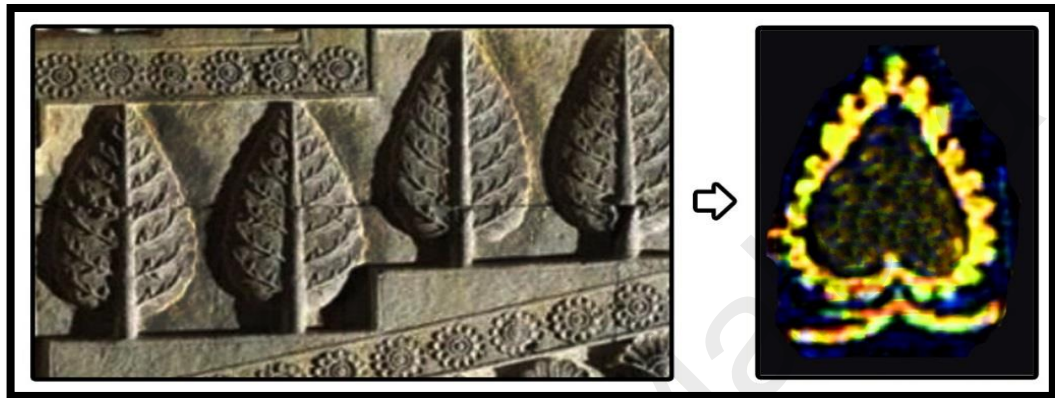
Following the comparative analysis of pictures above, of the sacred Sassanid plants that mentioned in the Persian literature and art historic books, veggie motifs which depicted on the body of Sassanid phoenix from Sample 1, seems have the most similar properties with sycamore leaves and cypress tree, separately. Through the picture below this research shows and explains more about these similarities.



**Figure 33 Separation and analysis of motif inside the phoenix wing into two separate vegetable motifs (WordPress.com, 2017), (Riordan, 2017)**

According to the theory of Panofsky in terms of iconography and iconology that he suggested to study on value of an element in the culture and religion to proof the iconic value of a motif or artwork, cypress and sycamore trees both have cultural and religious roots in the ancient Persia. As before explained in the review part, cypress had a significant value. In Iranian legendary mentioned that the cypress tree is a symbol of the God of vegetal. Mithras is also somehow a symbol of vegetal God. Cypress motif can be seen in Mithras temples a lot (Bahar M. , 1997, p. 275). These trees due to its resistance to bad weather conditions and being evergreen, in art and literature of Iran was a symbol of life, Euphoric and joy, endurance and liberation (Gholizadeh, 2008, p. 268). It seems sycamore trees have the same properties in both appearance and conceptual value with

the mythical tree with mentioned about that in the Shahnameh and sacred Avesta and had played a role in the ancient art and culture and religion as a symbol of ancient Persia and Sassanid era. Picture below is an example of cypress motif that has been depicted during ancient Persia.



**Figure 34** An example of cypress tree motifs that depicted during ancient Persia on one of the Persepolis walls, 550-330 BC (nya, 2016)

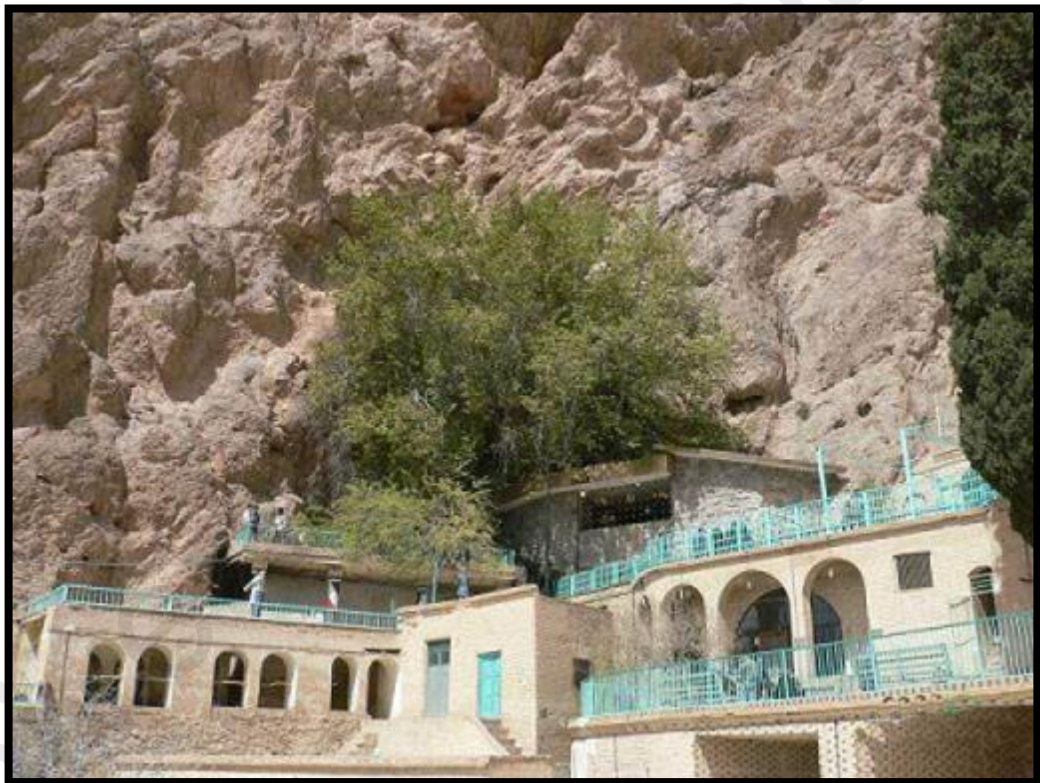
Cypress tree that was considered sacred for ancient Iranians and repeated as carved relief motifs in Persepolis. This tree was used as a symbol of vegetal God in Iranian legendary. Seems the above motif on the right side that was taken from wing of a Sassanid phoenix motif Sample 1, inspired from Cypress tree.

In the middle of the motif that seems to be a cypress tree, there is another motif visible inside that seems to be similar Sycamore leaf that has the most similarity among sacred plants during ancient Persia especially in Sassanid dynasty. Although this motif is similar to the grapes leaf, because always grapes leaves motifs depicted along with their fruits to make sure the audiences about type of the leaves and plant, here in this motif the researcher could not find any evidence of grapes fruits.

Sycamore is the hugest tree in Iran that has a long life. Every year it renews its skin and its branches colors and exchanges into a fresh green. So, due to these characteristics that each year makes it to appear young, this tree was considered sacred in ancient Persian

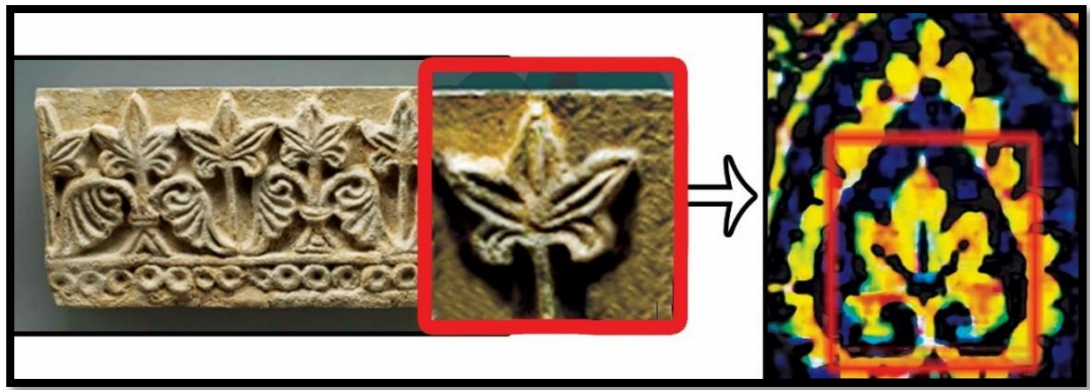


culture. Sycamore in the Persian culture was a symbol of king, glory and training. Ancient Persian artists were used to depict sycamore tree in their artworks in the scene of a full glory while people had cultural and religious celebrations under its shadow (Cooper, 2000, p. 115). During Sassanid era, it was the custom to plant a sycamore tree in front of the fire temple and Zoroastrians considered the sycamore as a sacred tree of life. Still, there is some of the Persian ancient temples with thousand years old trees live there. Here is an example of sycamore tree with an age of more than 1400 years in a Zoroastrianism fire temple in a mountain of Iran which remained from Sassanid era.



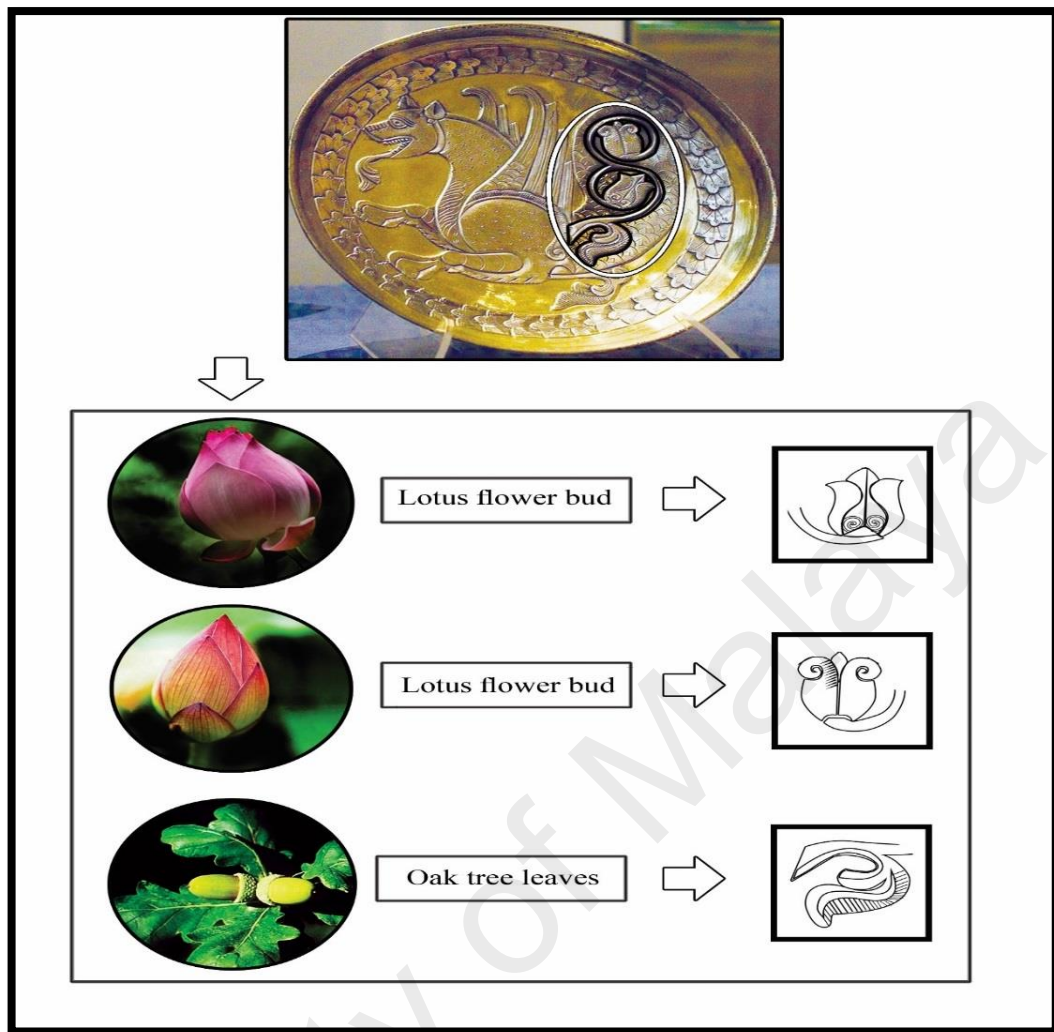
**Figure 35 Chak Chak, a Zoroastrianism fire temple with an age of more than 1400 years in a mountain of Ardakan village in Iran. Sycamore had had a sacred value during Sassanid era that after emerging Islam people changed their beliefs that under these great trees great holy men should be buried (Bahar D. M., 2007, p. 47) - (Iran Tourism Center, 2016)**





**Figure 36 A Sassanid molding with carved leaf motifs discovered in Ctesiphon, the royal Sassanid Palace that has similar shape with the leaf motif on the Sassanid phoenix wing depicted on the textile, the picture on the tope, right side- (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016)**

The picture above shows that leaves motifs are similar to the leaf depicted on the Sassanid phoenix which is on the textile. Although, these leaves could be similar to the grapes leaves too, because mostly in the other artworks, leaves depicted are along with the fruits it seems these leaves have different function here because the artist did not emphasize on any kind of fruit and there is no document to proof this leaves as grapes leaves. So the sycamore represented the sacred and royal lineage of the Sassanid dynasty.

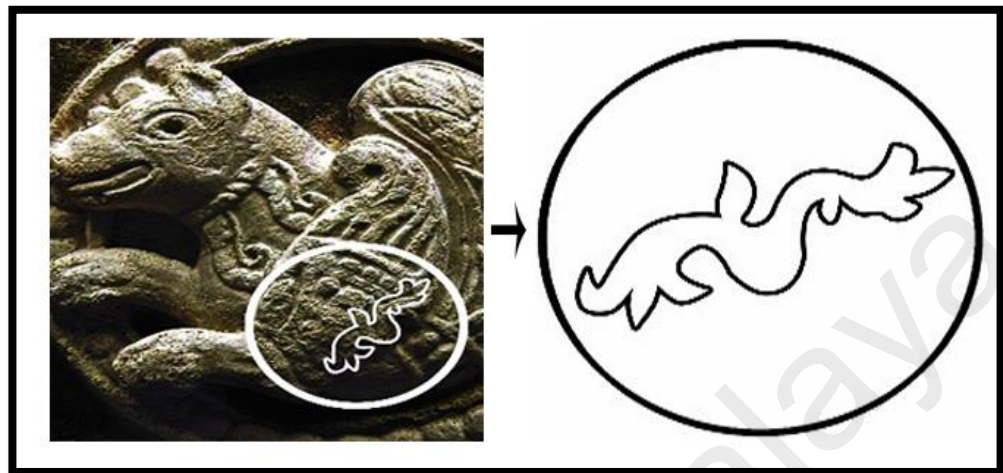


**Figure 37** Picture shows motifs that are depicted on the Sassanid phoenix tail are similar to the lotus bloom and oak leaf.

As already mentioned, during Sassanid era some of the plants were considered sacred. Through the comparing the leaves and flowers among Sassanid and ancient Persian sacred plants it seems the lotus bloom and oak leaf had the most similarity to the veggie motifs that were depicted on the Sassanid phoenix design in the second sample that are clearly shown in the picture above.

Lotus and oak were both mentioned as sacred plants during ancient Persia. Lotus was the symbol of Venus and water Goddesses in Zoroastrianism religion during ancient Persia. Oak tree is one of the oldest trees that has been in Iran since ancient time and

people was using both wood and its fruit. Oak among the ancient Persian historic and Sassanid art books mentioned as a sacred tree.



**Figure 38 Motifs depicted on the Sassanid wing seems to be similar pomegranate blooms**

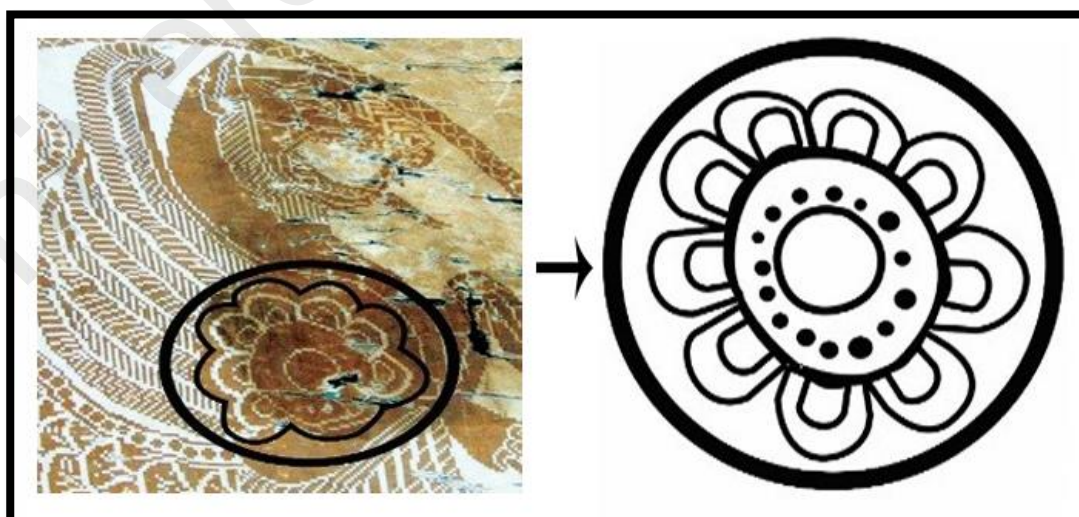
As mentioned, during ancient Persia especially in Sassanid era, people were respecting to the trees and plants. Some of those plants which was considered sacred during Sassanid era such as pomegranate is seen as pomegranate motifs in Ctesiphon and other remained monuments from Sassanid dynasty.

Through the comparison of this delicate motif depicted on the Sassanid phoenix wing as the third sample of this research it seems it has the most similarity to pomegranate blooms. In the picture, above, clearly the similarity is obvious. Both are elliptical shapes that is divided into the several sharp shapes from one side as the same as triangular shapes on the top. Zoroastrianism linked them to the fire or firebox because of its similarity of form to the fire. They used it as a symbol of blessing and fertility and it had both aesthetical and sacred values. This tree was used to plant around the temples for blessing (Dezfuli, 2006, p. 204). It seems that the Sassanid artist considered the sacred pomegranate in phoenix design to increase the fertility and blessing value of Sassanid phoenix.





**Figure 39** The picture above shows a relief, depicted on Persepolis wall as a bas-relief. Relief shows a pomegranate flower in the Achaemenid hand, (Payvand, 2016)



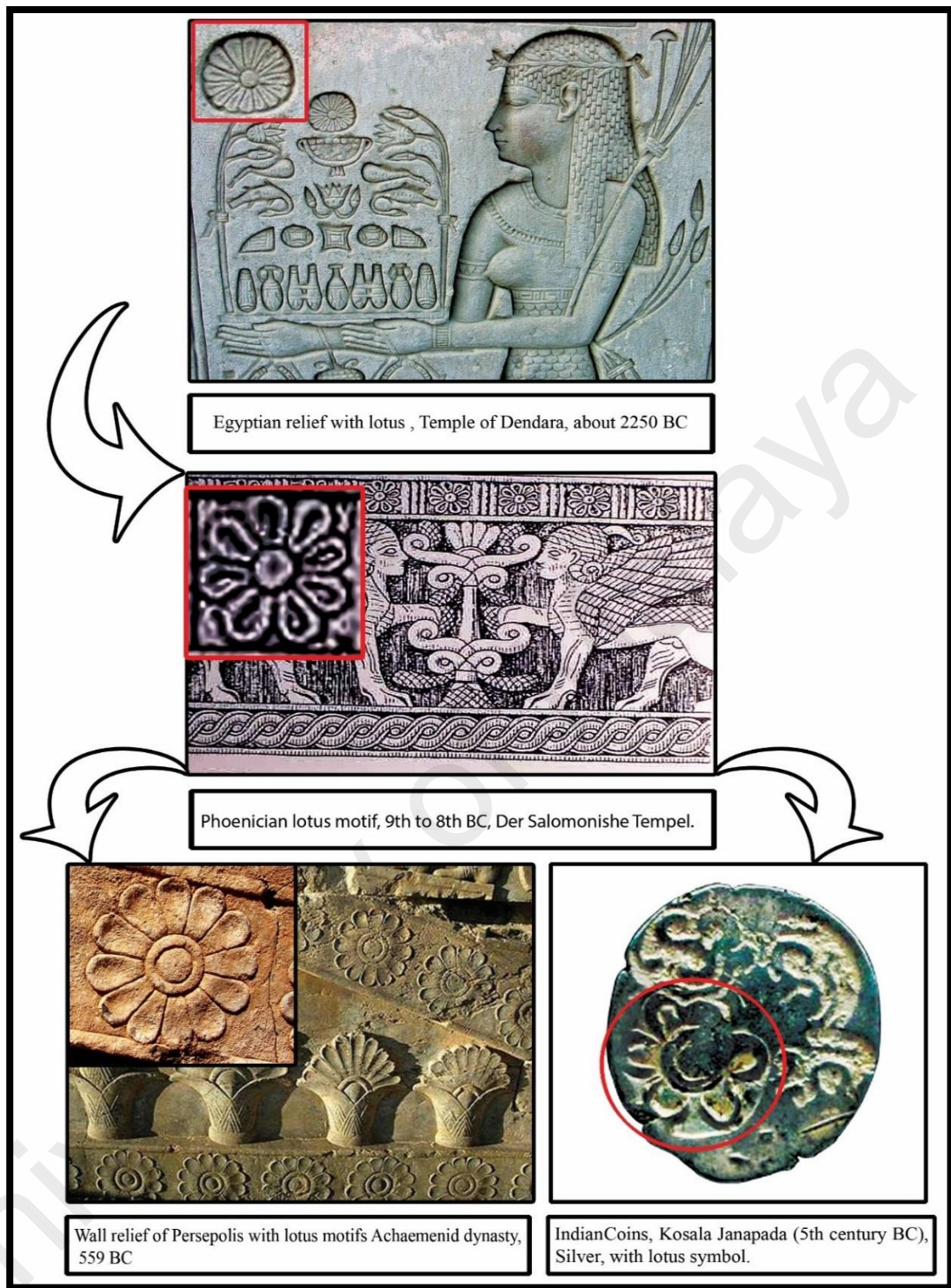
**Figure 40** Picture above shows the similarity of the veggie motifs which depicted on the phoenix wing with a lotus flower

According to the comparison of those plant shapes with the motif on phoenix wing it seems to be the lotus flower and it has the most similarity with that motif, that the picture above shows clearly their similarity.

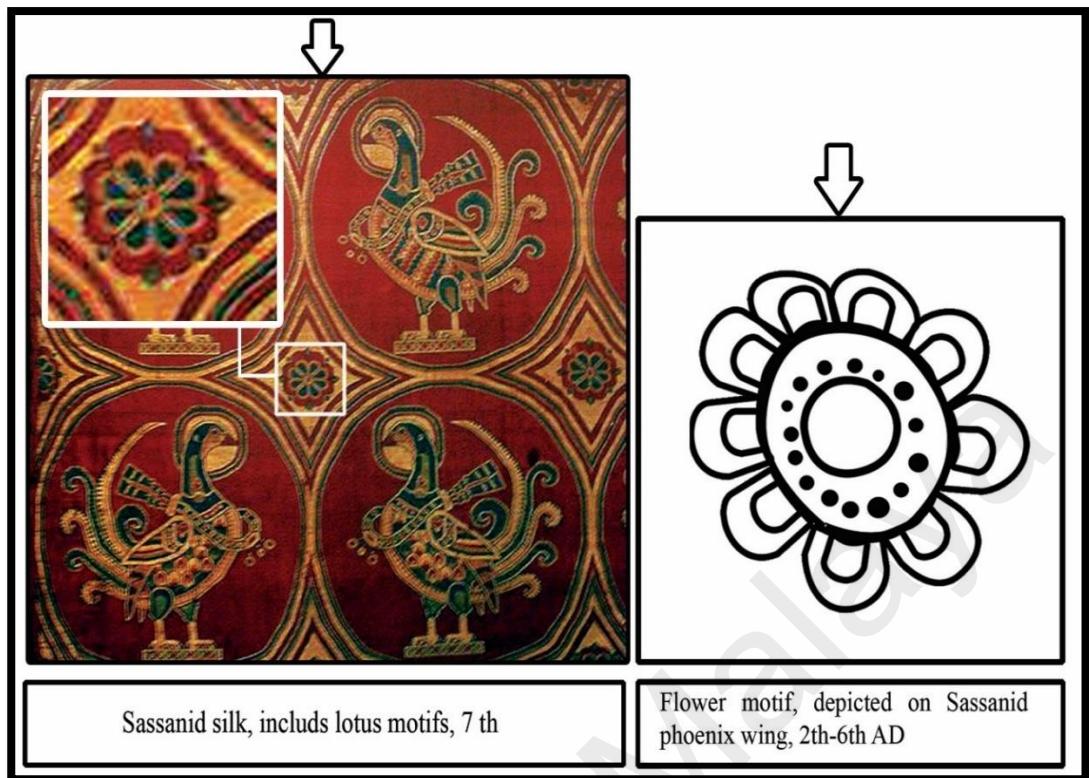
According to the picture, the lotus flower has two overlapped round shapes in the middle and its overlap petals are placed surrounding the round shape. In the same way, the Sassanid phoenix wing was decorated with a similar simple motif that designed as a circle with a smaller circle shape which placed in its center and semicircles that contain similar smaller semicircles inside and placed surround the circle shape and the small regular dots depicted surround and between two overlapped central circles that it seems the artist inspired from anther of lotus flower.

Since mentioned, during the ancient Persia especially in Sassanid era, people were interested in plants and flowers and even some of the plants were considered sacred. Lotus flower is one of the sacred flowers that is mentioned in Zoroastrianism. Lotus which is mentioned in Persian legendary as a Venus God, is a feminine imagery in the traditional religious of ancient Iran, which in some aspects is similar to the ancient Indian beliefs. In ancient Iranian traditions, the lotus flower was considered for keeping the Zoroaster seeds in the water, and they believed in Mithras which comes from the lotus blooms so this flower has a close relation with the Mithraism religion (Yahaghi, 2015, p. 429).





**Figure 41 Inspiration of lotus motif among different civilizations (pinterest, 2016), (Plumera, 2016), (Rajgor, 2016, p. 34)**



**Figure 42 Sassanid Silk motif with lotus motif (pinterest, 2016)**

Pictures show the lotus motif at first time which is depicted by Egyptian artists during 2250 BC on the sacred places, then Phoenicians during 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century BC inspired from those motifs and transferred the lotus motif in their temples where they used to pray. After that during 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Iran has been influenced and used as reliefs in Persepolis as a sacred motifs and Indian artists inspired of phoenix motif as well. During Sassanid era, also the lotus motif was seen in many artifacts for example on textiles and other artworks that here on the picture shows as an example of textile. Lotus in Iran was considered for both aspects of beauty and sacredness.

#### **4.3.2.3 Concluding Remarks**

During data analysis part, the researcher selected five Sassanid phoenix samples that was depicted on different surfaces and materials. The researcher, according to the Erwin Panofsky's theory of Iconography and Iconology tried to analyze and investigate each part of Sassanid phoenix body. As already it was explained, Sassanid phoenix that in

Persian language it is called “Simurgh” looks like a hybrid animal that is a combination of Birds and mammals.

According to Panofsky’s theory of iconography and iconology, the researcher followed these three steps to study the phenomena. First of all, the researcher analyzed each phoenix according to its formal approach. In this part of analysis, the researcher studied on formal elements such as line, color, space, depth, texture and ....

In the second step, the researcher divided the Sassanid phoenix body into the head, claws, wings, and tail and through reference to the historian and iconographic books, she has a quest on historian suggestions about each part of Sassanid phoenix. Then through the study on each part of Sassanid phoenix separately among the historian and books found out about cultural properties of each animal that had role in creating Sassanid phoenix.

In the third step, according to the Panofsky’s theory that mentioned the mind of human is both universal and particular, the researcher through studying on the Sassanid religion among the Zoroastrianism and Avesta book, tried to discover about significant of especial animals in Sassanid phoenix composition.

After this part, the researcher through the investigation of Sassanid art and Persian art tried to find out the origins of each parts of Sassanid phoenix to understand each part of its body and to know whether it has a Persian root or influenced by other cultures during ancient Persia.

Then finally, the researcher explored among the ancient antiques which is remained from ancient times in the Persia in order to find and show similar items with similar subject matters about each animal and motifs which are related to the Sassanid phoenix body to understand and prove the significance of each animal that has been suggested by



historians which participated in the Sassanid phoenix body and their role separately in the ancient Persian culture and religion that caused to create a symbol.

The researcher through the study and investigation on previous books by historians and Iranian studies scholars, found out that there are some similar suggestions about similarity of Sassanid phoenix body parts with some especial animals that considered significant during ancient Persia separately.

For example, Historians in their books have suggested the dog's head for the Sassanid phoenix head. Sassanid phoenix head in all samples was depicted from side view with an open mouth and hanged down tongue and has short sharp ears. Through the study about significance of dog among the ancient Persian culture and religions, it became clear that ancient Persian people were used to respect to the dogs and dog was considered as an honorable character after human in the society and the government determined strict rules for dogs to save their rights. And even in the holy Avesta, it is mentioned that dogs have a similar attitude like a human and advised people to respect the dogs like a man. So, it is estimated that the Sassanid artists had depicted the Sassanid phoenix's head like a dog because it's very close to human and have a helpful and protector characteristic.

Also, during the research, it is clear that the claws is belonged to the lion, because of the suggestions from historians and Iranian studies scholars. Lion motif separately in the full figure was depicted on many artworks that remained from ancient Persia. The senses of battles between Persian kings and lion that shows the Persian ancestors kingship culture about hunting lions that was a sign of king power. Also, regarding to the Erwin Panofsky theory of iconography, lion had a further value in the universal and religion of the ancient people. In the holy Avesta and Zoroastrianism, lion is considered as a solar symbol that is associated with God of water that it is called Anahita in Mithraism, it is obviously shown in the figure 45.

Sassanid phoenix that as a winged mammal creature attracted the historians to understand wings which are influences of which animal with symbolism value. So, through the study on history book related to this topic, the researcher found out that the eagle is considered as a bird that in the Persian kingdom and it was a sign of luck for the kings. And even the Achaemenid flag as an ancient kingship before Sassanid era was designed with an eagle motif. And, in the ancient texts it was mentioned that the Persian corps used to carry a flag with an eagle motif in front. Eagle was a sign of victory which can be seen in a relief of sacred Ahura Mazda and also it used eagle wings to shows about sacredness of this motif. So, eagle also can be considered as victorious icon included in Sassanid phoenix figure because it has both cultural and universal value that was related to Persian religion.

Another point that were emphasized in the Sassanid phoenix figure is about its wide and huge tail. According to Iranian studies scholars' suggestions, Sassanid phoenix was influenced by peacock on its tail. Peacock is a result of Indian culture impact during ancient times. Peacock is known as a beautiful bird that its tail decorated with eyes motifs that is symbol of rebirth, galaxy, and immortality. Peacock motif was seen on the Sassanid seals and palace decorations on the walls. Also, ancient Persians were influenced by Indian religion and culture believed peacock tail is an image of heaven sky. Because of this, the peacock was considered in the ancient Persian culture and religion as a symbol of beauty.

Interestingly, there is no different in the Sassanid composition in all the samples. The only point is about the artists who had depicted the phoenix with their handwriting on the different material and surfaces. Other point which is visible as a development in the Sassanid phoenix is about delicate motifs that were depicted on the Sassanid phoenix wings and tail. They are almost vegetal motifs that seem to be similar to the plants that before Sassanid era were considered sacred. For instance, lotus flower that in the

Zoroastrianism beliefs was a place that Zoroaster was born from this flower. And this type of flower is depicted regularly in the Persepolis. Historians believed that lotus flower first emerged in the Egyptian religion that reflected on their artworks after that respectively Phoenician, Achaemenid in Iran and Indians then Sassanid have all were influenced by lotus symbolism in their culture and religion that reflected in their artworks. The analysis shows that the lotus has been used as a symbol of rebirth or new beginnings.

Another plant that is visible in one of the samples is pomegranate. According to the historians because the pomegranate has a shape same as warming pan and has been seen in the Persepolis reliefs in the king's hands also, ancient people were used to plant this tree beside the fire temples it seems to be sacred. In addition, historians mentioned the pomegranate as a symbol of fertility during Sassanid era.

Other plants which are depicted in the phoenix samples are cypress tree and sycamore tree that are both considered sacred during ancient times. Those both are known as a sort of "Tree of Life". Because cypress is green and fresh whole the year and the sycamore tree refresh its skin and always looks young. These trees are seen next to the temples and even some of these trees are still exist next to the ancient temples since those times with age of more that thousands of years ago.

Acanthus is another leave that has the similarity to the one of the Sassanid phoenix tongues. Acanthus is a result of Roman and Greece art influences in the Persia. This kind of leaf have seen in the Sassanid palace as well. The acanthus is known as a sacred symbol of regeneration.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **5.1.1 Overview**

This part of research explains about the result of achievements and information that during this investigation the researcher did about Sassanid phoenix motif.

### **5.1.2 Conclusion**

The current research tried to study and know about this phoenix that is a collection of information in a motif remained from Persian ancestors. In accordance with this issue, the researcher determined three objects to investigate on Sassanid phoenix, with references to theory of visual art and traditional culture to find out the identity of the Sassanid phoenix and to analyze the importance of phoenix as a symbol of the Sassanid dynasty.

For the purposes listed three questions were raised such as;

- a. What is the form of Sassanid phoenix?
- i. Sassanid phoenix is a sort of mythical motif that is depicted in a form of composite animal with a mammal winged body. Its head was inspired from dog, its wings from eagle, its claws from lion, and its tail from peacock. That each one of these animals separately had important values during ancient times. Interestingly, in all the samples of Sassanid phoenix this combination of dog, eagle, lion and peacock have repeated.
- b. What is the identity of Sassanid phoenix motif?
- ii. Sassanid phoenix was created as a collection of animals that had a cultural and sacredness importance during ancient time in Persia. Animals such as dog, eagle, lion, and peacock are incorporated in to the body of the phoenix. In the table below explain about importance of each animal in the Sassanid phoenix body.

<b>Participated Animals in Sassanid phoenix body</b>	<b>Sacredness and Symbolism value in the ancient Persian Culture</b>
<b>Dog</b>	In the Ancient Zoroastrian religion of Persia, dogs were intermediaries between the profane and the sacred realms, and were important in rituals surrounding death. Secondly, they were important characters in the society. An honourable character that insulting to it caused to punishment. Its rights in the society are same as human right.
<b>Eagle</b>	A sign of the head of state and power in ancient Persia. Persian kings were using eagle as their flag. This bird is linked to royal Persian Power. The wise lord Ahura Mazda that is a sign of Zoroastrianism also associated with eagle wings as well.
<b>Lion</b>	Lion was a symbol of the power, in Zoroastrianism. Battling between the Sassanid kings and lions was the king's power prove so it was a symbol of kingship and related in literary traditions.
<b>Peacock</b>	Peacock was imported from India. In the Indian culture peacock was a symbol of solar, immortality and rebirth as marked on many ancient images of that bird with the tree of life. In ancient Persia, peacock symbolized the dome of heaven and the heavenly light.

iii. So, it seems that the Sassanid artists who created the phoenix, were contributed from the animals that considered top significance in society. For example, the artists selected dog because the Zoroastrianism advices to respect it this animal in any conditions. So, it is

estimated that the Sassanid phoenix also was a respectful symbol that had a protector and helpful character as well.

- iv. Eagle that was symbol of power and glory and a sign of the head of states appeared in the wing part. So, it seems that this part of phoenix is related to the kingship that associated with the glory characteristic of eagle wings.
- v. The phoenix claws that were inspired from lion, according to the Zoroastrianism about lion contain a force of evil symbolism. Also, because the failing a lion was a sign of Sassanid king's power and this animal known as a kingship symbol, it seems that the Sassanid phoenix sign also was related to the royal family and kingship.
- vi. Finally, the artists had used the most beautiful bird's tail for the phoenix tail. Phoenix that is a national bird in India that transfer to the Persia during ancient time is a symbol of solar, immortality and rebirth in India and symbol of the dome of heaven and the heavenly light in the ancient Persia. So, it seems that the phoenix had both beautiful and heavenly characteristic as well.

c. How was the Sassanid phoenix motif developed?

- vii. Interestingly during Sassanid era phoenix motifs were appeared with a same composition. It means that all the samples followed a similar pattern of head from dog, wing from eagle, claws from lion. The difference of these samples is depended on the artist who depicted the phoenix with his\her handwriting. Another difference that is visible in the Sassanid phoenix is about the vegetal motifs that are seems to be kind of sacred plants.

As the conclusion, according to the content it is obtained that Simorgh was a respectable characteristic that had the specifications including power, victory, beauty. As Markus Mode said “, probably Sassanid Simorgh motif shows the last Sassanid king's body” (Mode, 2006, pp. 107-128). So, it seen that Simorgh shows the top features of the last Sassanid kings in the template of an icon.

## **5.2 Suggestions for Further Studies**

The scope of the current research is limited to only the Sassanid phoenix in the five samples. So, for the further studies, the researcher suggests to the enthusiasts in the ancient art of Persia to continue this study to the further and even past era in the Persia.

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