

Review Article

THE STUDY OF HARPY'S IMAGE ACCORDING TO THE VARIETY OF SPECIES AND MORPHOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF TREE OF LIFE ON POTTERY AND METALLIC CONTAINERS IN IRAN'S ART ON ISLAMIC ART PERIOD (FROM FIFTH CENTURY TO EIGHTH CENTURY A.H)

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ABSTRACT

Harpies are combination of human's face (mostly female's face) with birds' body, so they could be classified in human-animal combination category. In old ancient beliefs, the Harpies accompany with human spirit to the other world after death. These creatures were presented in art of ancient civilizations including Greek, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Iran, and in Islamic period from fifth century A.H, their images appeared on pottery and metallic containers. Since these images are used frequently on pottery and metallic containers and they are considered as important motifs in Islamic period, this study aims to explain the related concepts to Harpy in Islamic Art period. How it could be possible to study Harpies according to morphology and variety of species in the context of Tree of Life? According to what bases are these images used on containers on these centuries (from fifth century to eighth century)? Since these images are used on pottery and mettalic containers in Islamic period, there's a supposition that these symbols aquired new concepts and they are not used just as decorative images and also in emergence of these symbols on works of art, expansion of Islamic Sufism and sometimes loyalty to aneinet concepts are effective factors. So far, no specialized research has been done to study the causes of emergence, concepts and application of Harpy's image in the context of Tree of Life. The methodology of this research is basically theoretical and analytic-descriptive and it uses analysis of data and images. The qualitative data collection method is used in this research, including various texts, pictures and materials.

Keywords: *Harpy, Tree of Life, Human-Animal, Pottery and Metallic Containers, Islamic Art*

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of Islamic art has been resulted by Islamic expansion in many countries in the world, in which most of images and old traditions are applied the same as past times, meanwhile the form and the meaning of some of these images has been changed. For human beings, one of the most favorite and interested images is the image of combinational creatures which is used in Islamic period too, and "Harpy" is one of the most frequent used images related to human being. Tendency to Sufism in this period and believing that human spirit is locked in his body trying to fly to the sky and reach to its origin is considered to be one of the most important bases in emergence of Harpy (Human-Bird) and sometimes for better understanding, related concepts to angels and birds such as Simorgh and Hoopoe which are of great importance in Sufism, are shown in this way. On the other hand, loyalty to some of ancient concepts is an effective factor in emergence of these images. In this research, we try to study Harpy's image according to morphology and variety of species in the context of Tree of Life and also we try to elaborate related concepts.

Tree of Life

Lots of ancient civilizations and religions consist of beliefs about Tree of Life or Holly Tree, and historically these beliefs maintain their importance among people even new cultures and traditions have been evolved. "Tree of Life is considered as the representative of fertility and germination and also the intermediate of good and blessing, and its leaves have curative treatment for human's pains" (Marzban and Ma'rouf, 1998). "This tree is supported by two Monks, two Druids or two animals which are

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considered as its guards. You should fight with these guards if you want to pick up its fruit to make elixir for immortality" (Dobokur, 1994). From the first in Iran's civilization, Tree of Life has been an important and valuable issue, and after the emergence of Islam, many of ancient beliefs and attitudes continued to be used and were combined with Islamic wisdom, philosophy and beliefs. In ancient Iran, the description of mythological importance of this tree associated with human's creation is that "the first man and woman in human race (Mashya and Mashyana) grew out of the plant and they were a tree together whose procreation gave raise to ten different human races, finally they became human beings, and Ohrmuzd (Ahura Mazda) taught them their responsibilities" (Hinnels, 2006). In Zoroastrian literature, the name of two trees are mentioned which are located inside the cosmic sea: "a tree consisting of all seeds which all other trees are its branches and HUM treewhite that all people receive immortality elixir from that tree and there are some fishes swimming in the sea to protect that tree (Ibid.). Chapter 42 in Devin Wisdom describes this tree: "a Simorgh living in this tree eliminates sadness; when it flies thousands of branches appear on the tree and when it sits on a branch, thousands of branches break down and the seeds scatter around (Tafazolli, 2001).

Trees like Pomegranate, Cypress, Plantain and Grapevine are named Holly Tree or Tree of Life; for example in Achaemenian period and Sasanian period, the Cypress was considered as the Tree of Life. In Islamic period, the form of Tree of Life has been modified according to Islamic worldview, and in works of art, this tree is corresponding with Tuba tree (Khazae, 2007).

In Islamic period, the Cypress tree was introduced in the form of vase motif on inscriptions and carpets; its abstract shape is the Arabesque motif which starts from a point in the pattern and covers the whole frame. This abstract motif is an exemplification of Tuba tree - a tree in the heaven mentioned in Quran- and its interpretations has been stated in Quran, Hadith and Narratives (Ansari, 1999).

In many Quran chapters, including Yaseen, The Believers (Al-Mu'minun), The Cattle (Al-A'raf), The Heights (Al-An'am), The Star (An-Najm), Mary (Maryam), The Narrations (Al-Qasas), and so on, the word "tree" is used frequently and different types of trees including Tuba tree (lote tree), Olive tree, Pomegranate, date, fig tree are mentioned to consider instructive and valuable issues in people's life. In verses 13-16 in Chapter The Star (An-Najm), Tuba Tree, the heaven tree, is described as so: "And vainly he saw him, yet another time; By the lote tree of the utmost Boundary; Nigh unto which is the Garden of Abode". According to different interpretations, Tuba tree is the uppermost trees in Heaven that its branches are stretched to Elysians' houses and it is the place of Gabriel; the second time the Prophet saw Gabriel was there.

Sohrevardi in his "Red Rationality" talks about Tuba tree and says:

"I asked the old man, what is Tuba tree and where is it? He said: Tuba tree is a huge tree. Everyone who is an Elysian will see this tree when he or she enters to heaven. I asked: Does it have any fruit? He replied: every fruit you see in the world is produced on that tree and the fruit you have here is its production. If there was no Tuba tree, there would never be any fruit, any trees, and any plants and so on; Simorgh's nest is on Tuba tree too" (Ibid). As Sohrevardi completely knows that VISPUISH tree is the place of Simorgh and Tuba tree is the place of Gabriel, so he infers that Simorgh, which is the secret of humanity and a perfect human, is the Tuba bird or Heaven Bird and interprets it as Gabriel. Among art works from Islamic period, you can see plenty of images including Tree of Life guarded by two people or two animals or two combinational creatures such as Harpy.

Study of Harpy's Images in the Context of Tree of Life

The first sample is a golden shaded glaze pottery bowl which was made in Kashan in 608 H.A and is kept in Abgine Museum in Tehran. Pairs of Harpies are drawn in the middle of the container and on both side of the Tree of Life (Figure 1) with the same size and they have turned their heads looking to each other. There is a collar decorated with vertical lines where that head and body are attached together. The background of the container is gold-toned and some cream-colored patterns are drawn too.



Figure 1: Golden shaded glaze pottery bowl made in Kashan in 608 H.A, Abgine Museum, Tehran

There is an aureole around their heads that maybe it connotes the perfect human being and it is a symbol of human and it shows their holiness aspect. Their make-up is done according to their customs in that society: a rounded and moon-like face, big eyes and arched eyebrows with fairly long hair that covers the neck. Sometimes their make-up seems to be in accordance with the customs of Central Asia and China. Maybe it is because of Literature influences on Art; since most of Persian poems consist of these rounded face descriptions which are named as Tork-e-Khata, and Khotan, and Tork-e-Shirazi and so on, these works are a source of inspiration for artists. Tree of Life is drawn delicately and its branches are around the body of these two. The circular background that these Harpies are drawn inside it, and with lots of rays around it, shows that the light and the warmth of sun make the human and the tree to grow up. The inside part of the container is divided to six parts, two parts across each other and they have the same motif, in complete harmony with the pair of Harpies.



Figure 2: Golden shaded glaze pottery bowl made in Kashan, 6th century. Source: (Pope, 2008)

The biggest part in this division is covered by plants motif, decorated by a bergamot (Toranj) in the center and scripts on its edge. In the second part, you can see two human beings with aureole around their heads and surrounded by two wheat clusters, they are sitting in front of each other. The smallest part of this image is associated with Arabic Language which continues to the edge of the container, and it says:

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"God keeps this safe, where ever it is".

So, according to immaterial context of these images and the scripts on this container, it can be inferred that this container brings safety, happiness, good and blessing for its owner. The second sample is a golden shaded glaze pottery bowl made in Kashan, which is decorated by some pairs of Harpies and trees (Figure 2). In the central part of this container, there is a visualization layout (sun) and in its center, two Harpies on both side of Tree of Life are drawn and they are in front of each other turning their heads looking at each other.

Around these two, you can see four pairs of Harpies with bigger sizes in a plant background and on the both side of an abstract tree.

Their places on the tree branches which are made of Arabesque patterns are like the central pattern and they are in front of each other turning their heads looking at each other. Harpies are completely similar to each other in the case of hairstyle, face, wings, feather, and aureole around their heads. The pairs which are in the central part have a big crown which probably means they are higher in rank and they reached to a degree to receive the crown. For this subject, you can consider the Sufism concepts related to the journey in which seven valleys of spirituality is experienced and also concepts related to ultimate perfection of mankind.

During that period, these beliefs were stated in the form of narratives and instructive stories by theoreticians of Sufism like Sohrevardi, Attar and so on and also in the form of stories about Hoopoe, Simorgh and the fly of holy bird to heaven (mentioned in the previous section) which were accepted fully by the society and for more impression they were used as a symbol on pottery containers by artists. Next image is a metallic square container which was made on seventh century in Khorasan, and is kept in Metropolitan Museum in New York. In this container eight pairs of Harpies are in front of each other, around an abstract tree symmetrically (Figure 3).



Figure 3: A metallic square container with Harpies images, early seventh century, Khorasan, Metropolitan Museum, New York, Source: www.metmuseum.org

The images are handcrafted on it and it seems that the central part of this container is an eight side visualization layout (sun) which is surrounded by a square frame. The patterns inside the visualization layout (sun) are divided to four parts: in the center of the container, there is a medal shaped image like visualization layout (sun) and in the middle of the image you can see a duck and a fish which have Sufism meaning related to blessing of the water.



Figure 3a: Image of duck and fish in the middle of the central part of the container, a division of Figure 3

On the next part of the container, you can see Arabic scripts inside a round strip.



Figure 3b: Arabic scripts inside a round strip, a division of Figure 3

The third margin which is the last decorative part inside the container and is placed between the scripts and visualization layout (sun) is covered by plants patterns.



Figure 3c: Plant coverage between scripts and the central visualization layout (sun), a division of Figure 3

Decoration of the main part of the container belongs to lateral walls around the visualization layout (sun) (eight sides of visualization layout (sun), and its deepest part; you can see the image of two Harpies in front of each other around the Tree of Life.



Figure 3d: A pair of Harpies on both sides of Tree of Life, a division of Figure 3

Harpies are drawn delicately and they are completely the same, while their tails are divided to two parts, and it seems that they are protecting the holy tree. On the outside margin of visualization layout (sun), you can see four lachak full of Eslimis and plant patterns and on a strip on the top and square shaped edge of the container, there is an Arabic phrase that ends to a flower-bud on the corner.



Figure 3e: Decoration of outside margin of the container with lachak Patern and an Arabic phrase, a division of Figure 3

Regarding the size of the container and its beautiful and splendid decoration, it seems that it was ordered by a king or an important person and it was used for ablution. Its decorative patterns (visualization layout (sun), fish, bird, Harpy, tree, Eslimi and Arabic phrase) are related to its application and all of them are in association with some concepts like light, blessing, health and forgiveness.



Figure 4: Stucco-work with Harpy's image and Tree of Life, Neyshabour, fifth or sixth century A.H, Metropolitan Museum, Source: (www.metmuseum.org)

Next image is a stucco-work with Harpy's image and Tree of Life inside a frame which was made in Neyshabour and its date back to fifth or sixth century A.H, and now it is kept in Metropolitan Museum (Figure 4). Probably, this work is a part of palace walls decorations. The main and central pattern consists

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of a tree with interwoven branches and lots of fruit like pomegranate and also two Harpies on both side of the tree protecting it. On the bottom, on the right side and left side of this frame, there are two single Harpies that are connected to two other Harpies on their tails. On this crossed tails, a plant has been grown and on the top of that between two harpies there are two fishes and on the top of the fish's body, you can see some droplets and it seems that some fruit and tree branches are scattered around. These images could be interrelated and they could be used for a special meaning.

Probably, this tree is the holy tree which is called ALL SEEDS or VISPUISH in Zoroaster literature; since they say that: Simorgh has nested on this tree and by sitting on it, thousands of branches break down and its seeds scattered around, this tree is inside the cosmic sea and some fishes protect it.

The interested artist, who was aware of ancient Iran's traditions, has drawn this image by combining ancient narration and Islamic one, and he has drawn Simorgh as a Human-Bird combination which was accepted in Islamic society. Since it is assumed that this stucco-work has been a part of a palace wall, maybe it brings blessing, power, protection and safety for its owner.

In Berlin's Islamic Art Museum, there is a bronze mirror which was made in Turkey around sixth or seventh century A.H; on its back you can see two Harpies which are very different from the Harpies we studied so far (Figure 5). Since this pattern was very common during Seljuk dynasty in Iran, it is possible that this pattern was taken there by Muslim Iranian artists to this region, or an artist used this pattern and was aware of the importance and the interest of this pattern in Muslims' beliefs.



Figure 5: Bronze mirror with Harpy's image, around sixth or seventh century A.H, Turkey, Berlin's Islamic Art Museum, Source:www.depts.washington.edu



In this figure, Harpies image is profile, which has one head and different bodies. It shows the portrait image of the Harpy. Both of them closed their wings, sitting on the branches of the tree, so you can see just the bottom of the tree.

Harpies with wings like acanthus's leaves, whose wings are stretched down from their waist to almost their heads. The end of the wings is drawn in both sides of head and it looks that they are protecting the head. Since Harpies are considered good creatures, their image on a mirror could connote concepts such as good and blessing, forgiveness, long life and so on. The last image is an elliptical big pottery jug, made in Syria in sixth century A.H and it is kept in Damascus (Figure 6). This jug has six handles and the artist used compacted and different patterns to cover all the empty spaces between the handles.

Unfortunately, over ages lots of these patterns are ruined and some small parts left intact. The only pattern which is not ruined seriously and is left completely intact is the part that you can see two Harpies around the Tree of Life. Harpies are in a background full of plants patterns, on the top of two lions, living under the Tree of Life and protecting it.




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Table 1: Study of Harpy's image in the context of Tree of Life according to morphology and the variety of species

Image	Head		Wings				Head to body attachment		Face		Body			Placement		Context	
	Decoration																
	Hat	Crown	Aureole	Doubled	Closed	opened	Decorated	Simple	Portrait	Profile	Front	Portrait	Profile	Front	Center		Front
			*		*		*		*			*					*
			*		*		*			*	*						*
																	Tree of Life

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Table 1: Study of Harpy's image in the context of Tree of Life according to morphology and the variety of species

Image	Head		Wings				Head to body attachment		Face		Body			Placement			Context	
	Decoration																	
	Hat	Crown	Angular	Doubled	Closed	opened	Decorated	Simple	Portrait	Profile	Front	Portrait	Profile	Front	Center	Asymmetric Front	Back	
					*			*		*		*				*		
		*			*			*		*		*				*		
					*			*	*			*				*		
Tree of Life																		

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On the top of these Harpies, you can see two human beings which are praying. In both side of the man's head, there are two lion's heads. The artist has drawn all the patterns in balance and symmetrically.



Figure 6: An elliptical pottery jug, sixth century A.H Damascus National Museum, Source: (www.discoverislamicart.org)

There is a script in form of a strip in the margin under the handles and this script is: "Wish health, happiness, prosperity". According to this script, it is clear that this jug brings glory, happiness, health, power, dignity and all good wishes for its owner. All the patterns in this work are in harmony with these concepts. Perhaps, it could be stated that human beings reached to immaterial world as a result of conquest to carnal desires and going on a spiritual journey and rested on top of heaven tree, and two Harpies as Tuba bird or Heaven Bird are protecting them. In the biggest part of this jug which includes the part under the script to the bottom of the jug, artist used the standing human beings image which their hands are around their waist to decorate the body of the jug.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

According the question about the use of Harpy's image in the context of Tree of Life on pottery and metallic containers in fifth to eighth century A.H (eleventh to fourteenth century A.D), this hypnosis can be proved that Harpy's image in Islamic period is used not only as a decorative pattern but also as a way of expansion of Islamic Sufism and development of Sufism theories in this period; ancient concepts were effective factors in the presence of these symbols on works of art. It seems that the application of Harpy's image or "Human-Bird image" is associated with Sufism concepts related to freedom of soul from body as its prison, flying to human's real place and reaching to the perfect human being degree. To answer this question that how Harpies are studied regarding to their morphology and variety of species in the context of Tree of Life, it can be stated that according to the related tables, the placement of Harpies with Tree of Life is mostly in the form of asymmetric and Harpies are in front of each other, their bodies are in the form of portrait, their face is profile and their heads and bodies attachment is simple, their wings are closed and their head decorations are an aureole and a crown. Finally, it can be stated that Sufism sources and concepts which were accepted and common on the society on that era and also loyalty to maintain ancient concepts were important factors in emergence of Harpies in the context of Tree of Life.

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