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# A Study on the Development and Evolution of the Ancient Goat Motif in the Decorative Art of Iran (From Antiquity to the Medieval Islamic Period)

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## Abstract

The mountain goat motif is regarded as one of the oldest applied patterns in both the art of the ancient world and that of Iran. Undoubtedly, this motif, which conveys essential symbolic meanings of fertility, life, and protection, remained widespread until the close of the Sasanian period and continued to flourish during the Islamic era. Numerous studies have examined the various representations of the ibex across different regions and historical periods, but none have addressed the process of its emergence, evolution, or transformation, nor identified the motifs that resulted from this transformation in the Islamic period. One of the central questions this research seeks to address is: What has been the process of development and transformation of the ibex motif and its prominent horns in ancient Iranian art, and what artistic themes did it embody? How was it reinterpreted in Islamic art, and what new meanings did it acquire? Which decorative motifs in Islamic art can be traced to this evolution and metamorphosis? The research method is descriptive, analytical, and comparative, based on a detailed study of motifs. Selected examples of the ibex motif and its horns, as well as other decorative motifs in ancient Iranian art through to the medieval Islamic period, were examined, illustrated, and analyzed. The findings from the analysis and comparison of motifs indicate that the ibex motif, consistently associated with the sacred tree of life (alluding to the Asurik tree motif), initially appeared in the form of spiral horns and later became integrated with the sacred plant of life. Over time, this fusion was further combined with the wings of birds. The resulting composite symbol of the triad—ibex horns, sacred plant, and bird wings—formed the basis of the early Islimi (Arabesque) and Khatai motifs of the Sasanian period. These motifs, with their geometrically symmetrical spiral structures resembling the wheel of the sun (chakra), subsequently developed into the Islamic versions of the Islimi (Arabesque) and Khatai motifs.

**Keywords:** Ibex Motif, Goat's Horns, Islimi (Arabesque) and Khatayi, Decorative Motifs, Ancient Iran.

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## Introduction

The ibex and ram, characterized by their long, spiraling horns, represent some of the oldest and most frequently recurring motifs in the art of various periods across the Iranian plateau. Consequently, diverse representations of these animals are observed throughout Iranian art history. In rock carvings from Timareh and cave paintings in Lorestan, including Mir Mallas, Dusheh, and Homyian, as well as figurines recovered from Ganj Dareh in Kermanshah (9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> millennia BCE), the ibex is depicted with an elongated body and crescent-shaped horns. The discovery of several ibex skulls with prominent horns on the floor of the hall within the “Great Structures” (likely a sanctuary) at Sheykh-Abad, Harsin (9800–7600 BCE), underscores their significance and sacred status among prehistoric Iranian communities.

The continuous recurrence of various ibex and ram motifs is evident on pottery from Tepe Bakun, Tepe Hissar, and Sialk, as well as on stone vessels from Jiroft, extending through Elamite, Achaemenid, and Sasanian artifacts. A salient feature in most of these depictions is the emphasis on their horns and their juxtaposition with the sacred plant (referencing the ancient concept of the Tree of Assurik and the ibex).

Given that composite motifs integrating human, animal, and plant elements are characteristic of ancient Iranian art and culture (e.g., Gopets, lamassu, griffins, Trees of Life, etc.), modern classifications that strictly separate vegetal, faunal, and human motifs do not fully apply, as these motifs are often interconnected. For instance, Mashy and Mashyana, the cypress tree, the ibex, and the Tree of Assurik all possess humanistic identities. Based on this understanding, motifs and symbols with similar or shared meanings undergo fusion, combination, or substitution, evolving into new forms or symbols. While their appearance may transform, their inherent vital characteristics are preserved throughout this process. Consequently, fundamental motifs and symbols are consistently maintained across ancient cultures.

In light of these interpretations, how could the ibex horn motif, which references the narrative of the Tree of Assurik and was utilized in various artistic forms—ranging from naturalistic to stylized and abstract representations—from the prehistoric era until the late Sasanian period, suddenly disappear in the Islamic era? The importance of this research lies in examining the evolutionary trajectory and transformation of ancient motifs to trace prominent motifs and symbols within Islamic arts. These

might be the result of the combination, fusion, and evolution of ancient motifs and symbols, reimagined and refined with Islamic concepts.

**Research Questions:** What was the evolutionary trajectory and transformation of the ibex motif and its emphasized horns in ancient Iranian art, and how was its recreation in Islamic art perpetuated through changes and metamorphoses in terms of themes and forms? Which decorative motifs in Islamic art are the result of this evolution?

## Research Objective

The aim of this research is to identify, analyze, and examine the genesis, transformation, and continuity of the ibex motif up to the medieval Islamic centuries.

## Research Background

Roman Ghirshman and other archaeologists have made numerous references to the pictorial ibex motif across various periods of Iranian history. Among them, Ernst Herzfeld has interpreted this motif in Iran more extensively than others, comparing it with similar motifs in other Eastern lands. He divides Sasanian art, following the Hellenistic and Parthian periods, into three evolving phases. In the late Sasanian era (third period), the primary artistic impulse was to incorporate ancient Iranian symbols that had either endured or remained alive in the subconscious of Iranians (Herzfeld, 1381: 344). In Arthur Upham Pope's writings, the ibex motif is described as a prevalent design in ancient Near Eastern art and a symbol of power (Pope, 1388: 10). J.C. Cooper praises the majesty of the ibex on mountain peaks and links its crescent-shaped horns to the moon, rain, and fertility. In her view, the ibex's horns signify supernatural power, divinity, strength, victory, procreation, and fertility (Cooper, 1379: 218).

Gholamreza Masoumi refers to the early humans' interest in depicting divine manifestations and their worship through animal symbols, attributing the eagle, lion, bull, deer, and ibex to the sun. He believes that every ancient civilization considered the ibex a manifestation of a beneficial natural element, such as: the angel of rain in Lorestan, a symbol of abundance and the deity of vegetation in Elam, and so on (Masoumi, 1349: 182 & 183). Fatemeh Modarresi, in the Encyclopedia of Iranian Mythology, discusses the importance of the ibex in Iranian myths as a center of power. Citing the views of Dadvar, Mansouri, and Pourkhaleghi, she notes that the ibex with unusually large, moon-crescent-shaped horns

is depicted on pottery. Sometimes, the horn symbolized the moon, and in most artistic creations, Anahita (the goddess of water) was embodied as an ibex. It is a symbol of life force, creator of power, and guardian of the Tree of Life. It also symbolized abundant harvest and the manifestation of plant life. After the dominance of the sun, the ibex was named the sun animal and is a zoomorphic symbol of the sun in Lorestan art. Moreover, quoting James Hall, Modarresi writes that it is a special characteristic of Shiva that he holds an ibex in one of his left hands, and this concept of the god of animals might have originated from the Indus Valley. In Egypt, Satis, an Egyptian goddess associated with the annual inundation of the Nile, wears the Upper Crown adorned with ibex horns, and was probably worshipped as an ibex initially (Modarresi, 1401: 262). Majidzadeh and Morteghart have written extensively on the ibex motif in Mesopotamian art and its reciprocal influence on Iranian art. Taheri, who has conducted numerous studies on the ibex in Iranian thought and writings, states that the goat, as the first domesticated animal, dates back eleven thousand years and served as a food source for Iranians, contributing to the expansion of human societies in this region. The ibex holds significant importance in Avestan texts and is referred to as “Aza” (Taheri, 1396: 164).

Chevalier and Gheerbrant analyze the concept of horns in the art and diverse cultures of world civilizations. They discuss concepts such as: the ram’s horn on Alexander’s helmet symbolizing the ram or Amun; the sun symbol (goat’s horn) and the moon (cow’s horn) and their connection among Sumerians and Indians; their meaning as power and strength, *linga* in Sanskrit and *corno* in Latin; the immortal horns of Agni, sharpened by Brahma; and the celestial ram in Dogon beliefs. Furthermore, in Jewish and Christian traditions, the horn signifies a force that embodies the concept of light, lightning, and thunder. “And when Moses came down from Mount Sinai... his face shone.” The phrase “shone” in the Vulgate (the Western Bible) was specifically translated to mean “horn,” which is why medieval painters depicted Moses with horns on his forehead. These two horns resembled the moon in its waxing phase. The four horns of the altar in the Temple symbolized the four cardinal directions of space, representing the infinite expanse of God (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1385, Vol. 4: 1-6).

Ghorbani and Sadeghi, in their article “A Comparative Study of the Ibex Motif in Rock Carvings of Eastern and Western Iran (Case Study: Sarbisheh and Oraman),” and Ashtari-Lorki and Kolahkaj, in their article “Visual Comparison of Ibex Motifs in Rock Carvings of Lorgardou and

Kiaras in Khuzestan with Rock Carvings of Timereh, Mazayen, and Khoravand in Isfahan and Central Provinces,” have examined the role of the ibex in their respective regions. Behnood, Afzal Tousi, and Mousavi-Lor, in their article “A Study of the Historical Evolution of the Ibex Motif during the Sasanian Period,” investigated the evolution of the ibex motif in a realistic manner, primarily focusing on the technical evolution and development of Sasanian artworks.

Most of the valuable studies mentioned above have described and analyzed this motif from visual, historical, and mythological perspectives. Although researchers have attempted to study and examine the ibex motif and its convoluted horns from various dimensions, and some of them (such as Pope and Herzfeld) have referred to the succession of this motif in the Islamic era, none have provided an analysis regarding its succession and evolution after Islam, and the resulting motifs from this evolution have not been sought in the remaining artworks.

## Research Methods

The research method adopted is descriptive-analytical, which is based on the comparative examination of motifs. Data collection was conducted through library resources, and the research data was compiled via study, observation, and written sources. The statistical population of the study includes the ibex motif and its horns, as well as decorative motifs in ancient Iranian art up to the medieval Islamic period. The samples consist of thirty-one motifs from pre-historic Iranian works, twenty-nine from historical ancient Iranian periods, and eleven from the Islamic period, all of which have been analyzed in nine tables. The samples were selected with a specific purpose, and every effort was made to utilize drawings of the motifs rather than actual images of the artworks. In designing the samples, the motifs were initially sketched with a pencil and then systematically executed using Photoshop and CorelDRAW software, followed by analysis through both interpretive and illustrative methods. The artworks are organized chronologically from ancient to modern to effectively demonstrate the process and accurately analyze the evolution of the motifs.

## Theoretical Foundations: The Ibex Motif in Ancient Iranian Culture, Religions, and Pahlavi Texts

Mohammad Naseri-Fard, an expert in rock carvings in Iran, states in an interview: “More than 90% of Iran’s rock carvings are of the ibex, and the

ibex motif is a symbol of ancient Iran, carrying themes of water-seeking, fertility, abundance, and protection” (Pārsāzādeh, 1394: 269).

• **The Guardian Ibex: Naseri-Fard believes:** “In ancient culture, the ibex was an expression of an angel, sought for help in times of hardship, and the root of this belief goes back to one of ancient Iran’s myths” (Pārsāzādeh, 1394: 269). In the written sources studied, the ibex motif is often depicted alongside a sacred plant or symbol, guarding it. The sacred tree or plant in ancient Iranian culture represents various symbols: the cosmos, life, the sun, existence, and an embodiment of love, worship, religion, and a symbol of water, associated with the Mithraic ritual and the goddess Anahita, consistently protected by the ibex with its long, winding horns. “Among the ritual ornaments of Lorestan, the Marlik bronze necklaces, glass pendants from Bactria, and even Achaemenid-period artifacts, the ibex motif is frequently seen as a protective amulet, indicating the virility of the male ibex and its connection to benevolent deities” (Taheri, 1396: 165). The Avesta also states, “To mothers who have given birth to a stillborn child, goat’s milk should be fed” (Vendidad, Fargard 5, Band 52)<sup>1</sup>.

• **Symbol of the Moon:** The long, curved horns of the ibex are considered the closest depiction to a crescent moon. One of the moon’s attributes is “promoting greenery,” and the moon is regarded as the source and overseer of life and fertility on Earth. Ancient Iranians believed the moon was the source of honey, and honey was considered a purifier of fruits and a protector against mortality. Therefore, the moon was regarded as the guardian of fruits and plants (Taheri, citing Vermazen, 1396: 166).

• **Symbol of Water-Seeking:** “According to ancient Iranians, the ibex is the manifestation of an angel sent by God for the survival and continuation of human life. Hence, wherever there is a watercourse, we see numerous ibex motifs, symbolizing water-seeking, and expressing the unique value and importance of water to the ancient Iranians. Similarly, the French archaeologist Stanley Cohen, in an article titled ‘The Ibex Motif on Ancient Iranian Pottery,’ identified it as a symbol of water-seeking” (Interview with Naseri-Fard, Pārsāzādeh, 1394: 270).

• **Symbol of the Deity Bahram:** The eighth and ninth manifestations of the deity Bahram were the mountain ram with spiral horns and the male ibex with sharp horns. “Bahram, created by Ahura Mazda, charges towards the demons in the beautiful body of a mountain ram with intricately twisted horns” (Bahram Yasht, Karda 8, Band 23)<sup>2</sup>.

• **Connection to the Story of Mashi and Mashiane (or Mithra and Mithriane):** They are the first Iranian parents. King Kayumars or Gayomartan (the living immortal) was killed by Ahriman after thirty years of life. Two drops of the water that were behind him fell to the earth and sank into the soil. That plant remained in the ground for forty years, and then a two-stemmed plant, like rhubarb, grew from it, which was called Mashi and Mashiane. Their food was the milk of a white goat ([Bundahishn, Chapter 9, Band 103](#))<sup>3</sup>. After fifty years, they had offspring, all of whom they ate. Until they had an offspring whom they did not eat and named Siamak. He is the ancestor of all humans ([Taheri, citing Biruni, 1396: 34](#)).

• **The Story of the Asurik Tree:** The most frequent depiction of the ibex with long, winding horns is associated with the Asurik tree. From prehistoric rock carvings to works of the Islamic period, this motif appears repeatedly and alternately. The Asurik tree is the name of a rhyming story in Pahlavi and is among the few non-religious texts that have survived from this language ([Navabi, 1386: 7](#)). This epic poem concerns a symbolic debate between a tree (likely a date palm) and an ibex. In this debate, each tries to prove its superiority while belittling the other. It begins with the tree's boastfulness ([Stanzas 1-28 of the poem](#)), followed by the date palm's humiliation by the ibex ([Stanzas 29-46 of the poem](#)), and finally concludes with the ibex's boastfulness and victory, leaving the date palm dejected ([Stanzas 47-117 of the poem](#))... ([Aryan, 1398: 25](#)).

### **The Genesis, Evolution, and Transformation of the Ibex Motif from Prehistory to the Early Islamic Period**

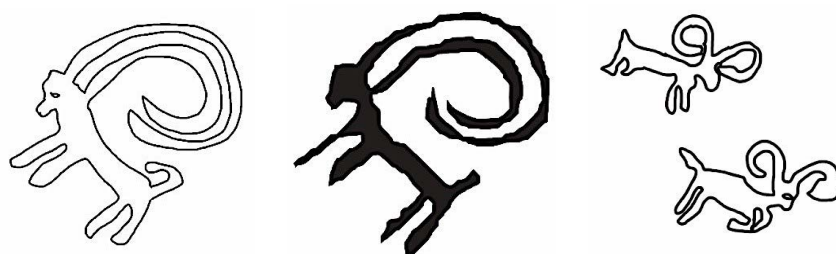
The various designs of the ibex motif in art from prehistory to the early Islamic period can be broadly categorized into three types:

1. The sequence of the ibex motif alongside the sacred plant, presented realistically and evolving purely in terms of technique.
2. The ibex and sacred plant motif gradually becoming abstract, to the point where the ibex is eliminated, and only its horns remain alongside a plant symbol.
3. In the process of abstraction, the ibex and sacred plant motif integrates with other symbols or is replaced by similar symbols. Consequently, new motifs are created that, despite not having significant visual resemblance to previous motifs, retain the symbolic characteristics of their constituent elements.

It should be noted that in each period from prehistory to the late



Sasanian era, all three methods were employed in the depiction of the ibex and the Tree of Life. For instance, in Sasanian art, this motif exists in three forms: realistic, simplified and abstracted, and evolved. The earliest ibex depictions are carved realistically on stones and cave walls. The oldest among them appear to be on the Timareh rock carvings, which contain the earliest human-designed spirals in the form of the ibex's winding horns (Fig. 1). This looks great! The translation captures the nuances of the original Persian text, especially the scholarly tone and the specific terminology. I've aimed to maintain the flow and clarity, ensuring that the symbolic meanings and research methodology are accurately conveyed in English.






◀ Fig. 1: Iranian Ram Carvings, Timareh Rock Art, Estimated Age Approximately 40,000 Years (Authors, 2024).

The significance of the ibex motif lies in its horns. Consequently, an emphasis on horns is evident in carvings from prehistoric and historical periods. Table (1) provides a general overview of selected examples of this motif across different eras of Iranian art. Images (A), (B), and (C) depict ibexes rendered in prehistoric artifacts, where the emphasis on horns is a common characteristic. Image (B) features stylized ibexes positioned on either side of a triangular shape, serving as an abstract, vegetal symbol for agricultural lands. This recurring motif alludes to the story of the Asurik tree and the protective ibex. Image©, from the collection of Shush goblets, exhibits a greater degree of stylization than the preceding examples. The hallmark of this motif is its long, spiraling horns that conform to the geometric principle of the Abbasi (logarithmic) spiral. Frequently, the horns of the ibexes on Shush goblets encircle a plant symbol, rather than being depicted in isolation. Image (D) is an example from the Jiroft civilization, engraved on soapstone vessels. In Jiroft artifacts, the ibex is consistently depicted alongside the Asurik tree. Although their design style is naturalistic, the rendering of the lines as delicate curves guides the motif towards ornamentation. Image (E) shows seals and buttons engraved with a naturalistic depiction of an ibex, where its horns seem to guard a plant symbol. Images (F) and (G), from the Elamite and Luristan civilizations



respectively, also reference the story of the Asurik tree with protective ibexes. These motifs are more stylized than their predecessors. A significant point is that the rendering of the ibexes approaches a vegetal form, while the depiction of the trees of life tends towards an animalistic quality. Despite their visual convergence, they retain their symbolic characteristics. The narrative of the ibex and the plant continues into the Achaemenid period (Image: T). Achaemenid and Parthian rhytons were often crafted with ibex heads or heads of animals conceptually substitutable for the ibex. The crescent-shaped cylinder of the rhyton refers to the moon, a symbol associated with the ibex. Concurrently, it serves as a vessel for sacred plant essences consumed by kings and nobles, underscoring and reiterating the story of the ibex and the plant with the aforementioned mysteries, codes, and meanings. The hilt of an Achaemenid sword (Image H) conveys a similar narrative, with two ibexes flanking a hilt shaped like a lotus flower (the Achaemenid rosette), providing guardianship. The lotus flower (flower of Anahita) symbolizes love and femininity and is an Achaemenid emblem, regarded in Achaemenid culture as a symbol of purity ([Pārsāzādeh, 1394: 264](#)), peace, and life ([Moadarresi, 1401: 959](#)). The Asurik ibex and the guardian ibex motif appear in various forms in Sasanian art – naturalistic (Images K and L), stylized, and abstract (Table Six). The importance of this motif is such that it is incorporated into the crowns of some Sasanian kings. In the depiction of Khosrow Anushirvan (Image K), two spiraling horns are positioned on either side of a moon symbol. What distinguishes Sasanian art from other ancient periods is the combination, synthesis, and substitution of motifs and symbols, leading to the creation of new designs that have gradually become abstract. The result of this process is the creation of motifs that, while unique, encapsulate several significant ancient symbols, preserving their vital elements within their unity. This is akin to the interpretation of “multiplicity in unity” discussed in the context of Islamic art.

**Table 1: Examples of ibex horn motifs in Iranian art, from prehistory to the Sasanian period** ([Authors, 2024](#)). ►

		
A: Types of Depicted Ibexes, Bakun ( <a href="#">Taheri, cited in: Alizadeh, 2017: 168</a> )	B: Ceramic Bowl from Tepe Shahrīār (4800-5200 BCE, National Museum 3545)	C: Motif from Shush I Pottery ( <a href="#">Pope &amp; Ackerman, 1938: 220</a> )
Emphasis on horns in the ibex depiction and various designed horns.	Ibex and plant symbol (agricultural lands represented by a triangle).	Simplified (stylized) ibex, with an emphasis on exaggerated horn design.




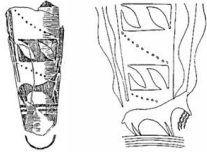


D: Ibex Motif Flanking the Tree of Life (Referencing the Asurik Story), (Majidzadeh, 2003: 28)	E: Various Seals, Tepe Giyan, Nahavand (Herzfeld, 1941: Plate XVI)
Depiction of the Asurik tree and ibex story in a realistic style with decorative elements.	Realistic depiction of ibex and sacred plant motifs.
F: Engraved Motifs, Elamite Seals (Porada, 1975: 73)	G: Engraved Motifs, Luristan (Herzfeld, 1941: 171)
Two ibexes flanking the Tree of Life (referencing the Asurik story). The ibexes approach a vegetal form, and the sacred plant approaches an animalistic form.	
H: Achaemenid Sword Hilt (Taheri, 2007: 191), Reza Abbasi Museum; T: Achaemenid Rhyton (Taheri, 2017: 190), 5-4 <sup>th</sup> Centuries BCE	K: Depiction of Khosrow Anushirvan on the Saint-Denis Crystal Dish (Herzfeld, 1941: 325); L: Gilded Plaster Fragment, Chal Tarkhan, Sasanian (Taheri, 2017: 45), National Museum Archive
Two ibexes and a rosette (lotus flower) in the center and at the end of an Achaemenid sword hilt, referencing the Asurik story.   Golden rhyton in the shape of an ibex head; its body serves as a vessel for plant essences, referencing the ibex's guardianship of the plant.	Horns positioned on either side, resembling the moon, a symbol associated with the ibex, replacing the sacred plant.   Realistic depiction of the Asurik tree and ibex story in the gilded plaster fragment.

**Table Two:** presents examples of ibex motifs with exaggerated horns, emphasizing this feature. Based on the motifs in Table 1 and the current table, it appears that floral symbols were abstracted earlier than animal symbols.

- A: The vegetal symbol consists of two concentric circles and curved lines surrounding the horns. The horns themselves are also designed in a delicate manner, resembling plant forms.
- B: The vegetal symbol takes the form of an abstract sun or lotus flower.
- C, D, E, F: The horn designs resemble tree branches.
- D: A dog replaces the vegetal symbol.
- E: Horns resembling plant stems and leaves flank an abstract, cruciform motif representing the sacred plant.
- F (Tell Bakun pottery): The ibex with its branch-like horns stands on a crescent shape, likely to represent the moon (a symbol associated with the ibex). On either side, there are abstract vegetal motifs with a cruciform structure.

This table illustrates the simplification (stylization) and abstraction of motifs, particularly vegetal ones. It also demonstrates the early integration of ibex horns with vegetal forms, the juxtaposition of shared symbols such as the moon and the ibex, and the substitution of other symbols for the sacred plant.

**Table 2: Evolutionary stages of the ibex motif**  
(Authors, 2024). ►

		
A: Cylinder seal impression, Susa (Herzfeld, 1932: Pl. XVII)	B :Prehistoric pottery motif, Sialk (Pope, Ackermann, 1938: 231)	C: Sialk pottery motif, Chalcolithic period, 3800-3700 BCE, Kashan (Taheri, 2017 :187)
The ibexes are simplified (stylized), but the vegetal symbols have become abstracted. Emphasis is placed on the ibex horns and the sacred plant symbol. The ibex horns have approached a vegetal structure.		
		
D, E: Tal-e Bakun, Persepolis, 4200 BCE (Herzfeld, 1932: 48)		B Tal-e Bakun, Persepolis (Herzfeld, 1932: Pl. VIII)
Abstraction of vegetal symbols, approximation of ibex horns to vegetal structures, and the replacement and/or coexistence of the ibex (or ibex horn) with other symbols.		

**Table 3:** As previously discussed, distinct categories of “animal” and “plant” motifs do not exist in ancient art and culture. Many designs are actually composites, blending human, vegetal, animal elements, and other symbols. This table highlights composite motifs that integrate the ibex symbol, or its horns, with other symbols, particularly vegetal forms and the cruciform.

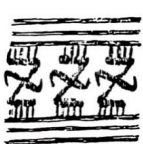









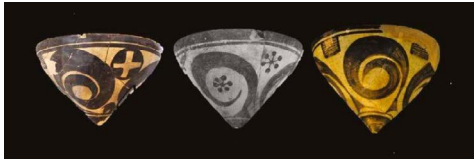

- Row 1 (Figures A-E): Here, the ibex and the sacred plant (likely palm leaves) are combined. This is reminiscent of the myth of the zu bird and the tree. The composite designs are arranged to form one or more cruciforms. The cruciform is constructed from the rotational symmetry of golden, Shah Abbasi (logarithmic), and Archimedean spirals, and is associated with the horn and moon symbols. Attention is also paid to the crescent shape of the horns, especially in figures A, D, and E. An interesting detail in figure E is the depiction of juxtaposed ibexes, which also form a vegetal symbol. The ibex horns are rendered separately and in a cruciform manner, placed centrally and along the rim of the plate.

• Row 2 (Figure F): The motifs described in this row represent the abstraction of these composite designs of horns, plants, and cruciforms.

• Row 3 (Figures G-I): This row showcases another example of the synthesis of three valuable symbols from ancient culture and art. The exaggeration and enlargement of the horn symbol, due to its semantic importance, along with the reduction in the size of the ibex body, are characteristic features of these motifs.

• Figure G: Depicts two ibexes viewed from the front in a stylized manner. The spiral horns of the two ibexes form a cruciform. Additionally, vegetal symbols are placed between the horns of each ibex, and a solar disk symbol is positioned between the horns of the two ibexes.

• Figures H and I: Portray the ibex in profile. The horns, drawn from the base of a symmetrical spiral that thickens at the midpoint of the curl, encircle and guard vegetal symbols.





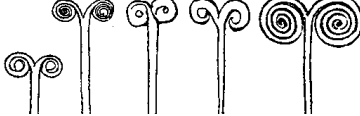

				
A: Fars (Herzfeld, 1932: 34)	B, C, D: Tepe Rigi (Fars), (Herzfeld, 1932: 23)			E: Tepe Siah (Fars), (Herzfeld, 1932: 22)
<p>Fusion of the Cross, Ibex (or its Horns), and Plant (Referencing the Tale of the Asurik Tree and the Guardian Ibexes): A: The fusion of the horns of two ibexes, forming a cross in the center. B: Horns shaped like plant leaves (possibly palm), simplified ibexes, ibex bodies designed as a cross, or a cross formed from four ibexes. C: Ibex bodies shaped like palm leaves, a cross formed from ibex horns in the center of the design, with each horn referencing a lunar symbol. D: Possesses all the aforementioned characteristics but rendered in a completely abstract design. E: The placement of four ibexes in a cross formation, where each form is composed of the fusion of two conjoined ibexes and the vegetal symbol of a date palm leaf. The horn symbol is shaped like a cross and appears separately in the center of the design</p>				
				
F: Combined and Abstract Motifs from the Fusion of Ibex Horn Symbols, the Cross, etc. Tal-e Bakun (Fars), (Herzfeld, 1932: 35)				
All four designs are abstract and fused forms of the ibex horn, plant symbols, and the cross.				
				
G - Tal-e Bakun, Marvdasht (Herzfeld, 1932, Plate XII) H, I - Susa (Alvarez-Mon, 2020: 80)				
<p>Fusion of the Ibex/Ibex Horn with the Cross and Plant Symbol Between the Horns or at the Center of Each Horn: G: Placement of two ibexes with exaggerated symmetrical horns in the form of a cross. H &amp; I: Placement of three ibexes in profile in the form of a cross, cross symbols in the center of the spiral of each horn and between the horns.</p>				

◀ Table 3: Simplification (stylization) and abstraction of the ibex and sacred plant motif, and its fusion with other motifs and symbols (Authors, 2024).

**Table 4:** The Step-by-Step Evolution and Abstraction of the Motif

In the gradual process of evolution and abstraction, the body of the goat is progressively omitted, and all its associated concepts are manifested solely within its horns. This condensation is not limited to the zoomorphic symbol but also extends to the botanical emblem. As evident in figures (A, B, and C), the designer has entirely removed the goat's body or reduced it to a minimal form (the triangular shape in figure C). Figure (A) comprises alternating crescents, linked to the lunar symbol, which encompass the sphere of Mithra. Figure (D) depicts a realistic ornament in the form of an ibex head. However, in the ornaments of figures (E and F), the goat is eliminated, and its horns are integrated with the sacred plant, with both abstracted into symmetrical Archimedean spirals.

**Table 4:** Elimination of the ibex body, retaining the horn spiral and vegetal symbol (Authors, 2024). ►



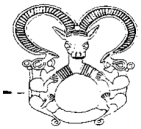



		
<p><b>A:</b> Motif from prehistoric Susa ceramics (Pope, Ackerman, 1387: 1); Prehistoric Susa ceramic (Pope, Ackerman, 1399: 20).</p>	<p><b>B:</b> Motif from prehistoric ceramic, Susa I (Pope, Ackerman, 1387: 220)</p>	<p><b>C:</b> Ceramic goblet, Tepe Buhlan, Khuzestan, 4300-4000 BCE, National Museum 2419</p>
<p>Elimination of the Ibex Limbs and Abstraction of the Horn Motif into a Moon-Related Symbol, Alongside the Sacred Plant Motif.</p>		
		
<p><b>D:</b> Gold ornaments, ibex head, Tepe Hissar Damghan, Philadelphia University Museum (Pope, Ackerman, 1387: 20), Authors. <b>E, F:</b> Earrings, silver, Tepe Giyan, 2200 BCE, Herzfeld Collection (Pope, Ackerman, 1387: 287).</p>		
<p>Integration of the Abstracted Horn and Sacred Plant into a Symmetrical Spiral Symbol (Archimedean). According to the aforementioned content, these types of ornaments were used for protection against the evil eye and similar threats.</p>		

**Table 5:** The Abstraction of Mythological Motifs Over time, the fusion of these two mythological motifs transitions from a concrete representation to an abstract process. In artwork (A), the body of the bull is depicted as two horns, with the botanical symbol placed at its center. In this image, the distinct forms of the horn and the plant are still discernible. However, motif (B) presents two abstract horns rendered with a botanical quality, and the plant symbol, shaped like a triangle, is positioned in its center. A fusion of the horn spiral and the plant in the lower part of the motif creates an ornamental and abstract composition of the two symbols.




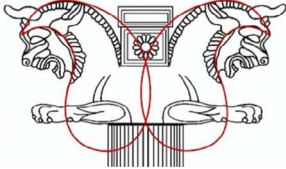
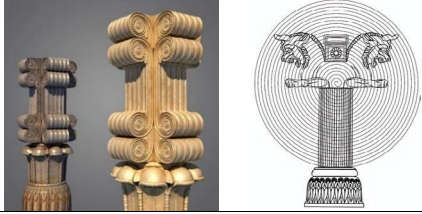

The second row of the table references motifs from Lorestan art depicting composite creatures—fusions of human, animal, and plant elements. Motif (C) consists of a goat and a ring, signifying the sphere of Mithra, flanked by two protective composite beings. Motif (D) shows the same structure with greater complexity, where the horns of the goats protect the composite human-animal-plant figures. Within the ring, two horn spirals guard the composite human-animal-plant being. Image (E) is a fusion that has become more simplified and abstract than images (C) and (D). Image (E) also represents a combination and fusion of horn, bird wing, and sacred plant motifs, which, through the process of abstraction of composite motifs (image Z), have been summarized into two geometric shapes: a spiral (symbolizing the horn) and a triangle (symbolizing the plant).

Achaemenid art, too, is a collection of repetitions and sequences of combinations and fusions of ancient symbols that, in its unique style and manner, undergoes a process of evolution and development towards abstraction and condensation. Achaemenid columns are clear examples emphasizing, repeating, and sequencing the narrative of the Asurik tree and the mythological goat protecting the lotus flower (the Achaemenid symbol). This is manifested in composite creatures of goats, bulls, and horses flanking the Achaemenid rosette flower (lotus) (thumbnail image). Furthermore, these two figures are placed above and on the sides of the column, which symbolizes the lotus flower, and are designed in a way that resembles a Boteh jegheh structure (symbolizing the horn), protecting it (image H). The column's decorations are also made of symmetrical Archimedean spirals, which symbolize the protective goats revolving around the lotus flowers of life (image K).

			
<p><b>A:</b> Elamite silver necklace, circa 3100-2900 BCE, Kew Pittings.</p>	<p><b>B:</b> Necklace, Ziwiye, Tehran Museum (<a href="#">Ghirshman, 1346: 311</a>); and an arabesque, part of the necklace ornamentation.</p>		
<p>The body of the bull in the form of two horns and as a <i>boteh-jegheh</i> spiral, with the sacred plant in its center.</p>	<p>Composite creatures in Luristan art in abstract form: <b>E</b> - fusion of ibex, plant, and bird wing; <b>F</b> - abstract fusion of ibex, plant, and composite creatures.</p>		
			

◀ Table 5: The evolution of the horn motif from the Elamite period to the Achaemenid era (Authors, 2024).



C: Luristan bronze standards, 6th century BCE, Collection of Ms. Christine R. Holmes (Pope, Ackerman, 1387: 328).	D: Luristan bronze standards, Iron Age, Reza Abbasi Museum (Talaei, 1387: 67).	E: Luristan (Herzfeld, 1381: 160).	F: Luristan (Herzfeld, 1381: 160), compared with example (A) in Table 4.
Composite creatures in Luristan art, repetition and sequence of the ibex motif and plant, replacement of the sacred plant with composite human-plant creatures.		Composite creatures in Luristan art in abstract form: E: fusion of ibex, plant, and bird wing; F: abstract fusion of ibex, plant, and composite creatures.	
			
G: Regular or symmetrical spiral, decorations on the central relief of the North Staircase of the Apadana, Xerxes seated on the throne, Persepolis, National Museum.			
The motif of the Assyrian tree and guardian ibexes in an abbreviated form, symmetrical (Archimedean) spiral: the horns of the ibexes and the triangle between two spirals: the sacred Tree of Life.			
			
H: Achaemenid capital.		I: Achaemenid capital (Pouyanou, 2017), (URL4), design by Authors.	
Composite creatures with a structure based on the boteh-jegheh (ibex horn) on either side of the Achaemenid rosette flower (sacred Tree of Life).		Repetition and sequence of the motif of the Assyrian tree and guardian ibexes in Achaemenid columns, two composite creatures on either side of a lotus-shaped column (Achaemenid symbol), and also the Achaemenid rosette flower (lotus) in the center of the two composite creatures.	
			
K: Water lotus within a regular spiral, Achaemenid, Persepolis (Taheri, 1396: 93).			
Decorations of Achaemenid columns: the symmetrical spiral (ibex horn) revolving around the lotus flower (sacred Tree of Life).			

## Sasanian Period

The Sasanian era inherited the cultures, traditions, and arts of previous periods in Iran, incorporating millennia-old structures, symbols, and motifs. This period marks a pivotal turning point in the evolution and development of the goat motif and its horns in ancient Iranian art. The motif of the goat and the tree of life, which had been combined, fused, stylized, or abstracted in various forms, now merge with bird wings during this period. While examples of this fusion exist in pre-Sasanian art, particularly in Lorestan, it became a fundamental symbol in the art and culture of the Sasanian era. The visual manifestation of this fusion sometimes inclines towards botanical structures, sometimes towards zoomorphic forms, or at other times, a completely abstract motif. Nevertheless, these motifs can never be considered purely botanical or zoomorphic, nor can one claim them to be a plant, a goat's horn, or a bird's wing.

**Table 6:** Image (A) presents a fusion of three symbols (goat's horn, bird's wing, and the sacred tree of life) with a cross, which are compared with the motifs discussed in the preceding tables for clarity and a better understanding of the evolution of the goat horn motif. In motif (A3), the spiral of the swastika, like a labyrinth, culminates in and embraces a botanical symbol, which is the very spiral of the goat's horn revolving around the flower (the tree of life). In Sasanian stucco designs, there is no positive and negative space; the area between motifs is often the shadow of the main motif. This superimposition further develops in the Islamic period, especially in the stucco motifs of Samarra.

Image (B) illustrates the repetition and alternation of the open Sasanian wing motif, decoratively carved on the wall of a Sasanian palace. The fusion of the three symbols (goat's horn, tree of life, and the wing of a mythical bird) are positioned on either side of a pomegranate-like plant (Image B, numbers 2 & 3). This same structure is maintained in the space between the motifs (the so-called negative space), both representing the repetition and alternation of the ancient guardians of the sacred tree of life from previous millennia. A wide range of diverse designs of this structure exist in Sasanian motifs.

In deciphering Sasanian motifs, we encounter examples that appear botanical, but with careful attention to detail and knowledge of the motifs' historical background, we arrive at different conclusions. For instance, the motif we today call Laleh Abbasi (a type of tulip) is likely the Sasanian open wing motif, formed from the fusion of the three symbols and placed on either side of a botanical symbol (Images C and D). In reality, the so-called Laleh Abbasi is a type of composite creature from ancient myths that has evolved into a beautiful and decorative motif. In this process, not only have the vital elements of its constituent motifs and symbols not been lost, but designers have skillfully preserved their mythical characteristics within the structure of the motif.

Laleh Abbasi motifs embedded in the positive and negative space of the stucco carving (C) consist of two Boteh jegheh forms, which could be the horns of two goats, botanical symbols, or two flying wings guarding the abstracted botanical symbol in the center. The amalgamation of three symbols, although creating a new motif, is designed in such a way that it remains definable by each of its constituent symbols. Motif (D) is designed with the same structure, although at first glance, it appears botanical. Motifs (E) and (Z) are other types of fusion of the three


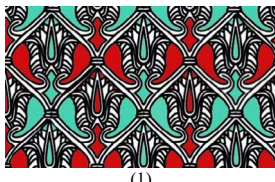




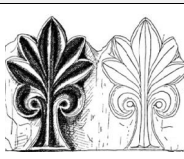
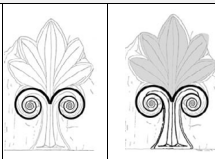
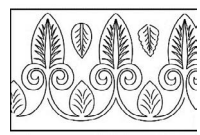

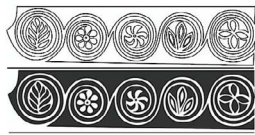




symbols and their condensation into a spiral form, placed on the sides and beneath the botanical symbol.

The geometric design of image (T) is drawn from the repetition of an interlocking cross-like pattern, which is the same composite motif of the three symbols and refers to the protective creatures and the Asurik system. The evolution of motif (H) is summarized solely in the repetition and sequence of the symmetrical spiral (symbolizing the protective goat's horn) that envelops the botanical symbol. This motif retains its original and ancient structure, still resembling prehistoric motifs from Susa and Sialk, with the difference that it involves repetition and alternation. However, in image (K), the three fused symbols have evolved and transformed into an abstract form. In both motifs (H) and (K), the sequence of Archimedean spirals is drawn at the base of the alpha spiral, which can repeat and continue infinitely in every direction. This means they have no beginning or end, thus being eternal.

The path that the goat motif with its twisting horns traversed in the Sasanian period develops in two directions. First, it includes motifs of symmetrical spirals revolving around the sacred plant, encompassing early Khatayi designs. Second, it leads to the creation of early and incomplete Eslimi designs, which are the result of the fusion and combination of three important ancient symbols: the goat's horn, the sacred tree of life, and bird wings in a general sense. Furthermore, the interpretation of the above motifs shows that this composite motif repeats and alternates based on the geometric rule of the symmetrical spiral (Archimedean) and the cruciform movement structure (rotational symmetry of the spirals).

Table 6: The evolution of the ibex and ibex horn motif in the Sasanian period (Authors, 2024). ►

<p><b>A:</b> Plaster fragments from a round column, Chaleh Tarkhan (Eshghabad), Rey, National Museum (No. 2602).</p> <p>1, 2: Fusion of the three symbols: ibex horn, Tree of Life, and bird wings. 3: Fusion of ibex horn, broken cross (swastika/gammadion), and sacred plant.</p>					
<p><b>B:</b> Quadrangular panels (Kroger, 1378: No. 75) and analysis of the recurring motif.</p> <p>The Tree of Life at the center of the recurring motif, ibex horns and open wings on either side of the sacred plant in positive and negative space (positive and negative design), referring to the Assyrian Tree composition.</p>					

			
<p>C: Wall background with alternating Abbasid tulip flower composition (Kroger, 1378: No. 93), Authors. C2: Arabesque headband in red and turquoise colors.</p>			
<p>The Abbasid tulip flower is a composite creature, a fusion of the three symbols: ibex horn, sacred plant, and bird wings. The negative space is shaped like an Abbasid tulip flower, resulting in an overlapping surface plaster motif.</p>			
			
<p>D: Part of a plaster relief, Hajiabad, Fars, 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, National Museum No. 4673.</p>		<p>E: Frieze, Palace of Kish (Pope, 1387: 769).</p>	
<p>The motif includes a composite form of the three symbols: ibex horn, sacred plant, and bird wings on either side of the sacred plant.</p>		<p>The motif includes a composite form of the three symbols on either side and below the sacred plant.</p>	
			
<p>Z: Plaster fragment, Kharg Island, late Sasanian – early Islamic period, National Museum (No. 3305).</p>		<p>H: Plaster fragment, Kharg Island, late Sasanian – early Islamic period, National Museum (No. 3306).</p>	
<p>The motif includes a composite form of the three symbols on either side and below the sacred plant.</p>		<p>The ancient Archimedean spiral motif (symbolizing the ibex horn) revolving around the Tree of Life, with its repetition and alternation based on the scroll (alpha) spiral.</p>	
			
<p>T: Facade covering, prominent plaster reliefs, Palace of Kish (Pope, 1387: 767).</p>		<p>K: Prominent plaster reliefs, Palace of Kish (Pope, 1387: 776).</p>	
<p>Repetition and alternation of the composite motif of the three symbols based on the cross (gammadion).</p>		<p>The motif includes a composite form of the three symbols: ibex horn, sacred plant, and bird wings, with its repetition and alternation based on the scroll (alpha) spiral.</p>	

## The Islamic Period

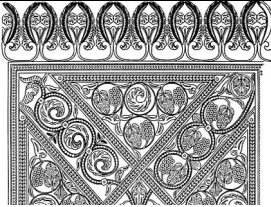




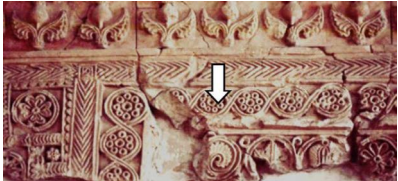



The artistic motifs, symbols, and structures of the Sasanians largely continued into the Islamic period, gradually being re-created in conjunction with Islamic culture. Through their integration with Islamic concepts and the growth and development of sciences such as mathematics, astronomy, and philosophy from the second to the seventh centuries AH, these inherited arts flourished, evolving and developing further. The early Khatayi and Eslimi patterns gradually achieved a higher level of sophistication during the Islamic era. However, in the early stages of this period, they did not yet possess distinct structures separate from each other. In fact, within the spiraling movement of a single motif, early Eslimi and Khatayi patterns branched off from one another. Today, in traditional design, while Khatayi and Eslimi coexist,



they have entirely separate structures, and a Khatayi flower or leaf would never sprout from an Eslimi pattern.

**Table 7:** The analyzed motifs in the stucco artwork (A), from number (1) to (4), demonstrate the repetition and sequence of the composite and evolved motif of the three symbols, or the early Eslimi patterns, positioned on either side of the tree of life. These motifs can never be attributed to just one of the symbols: the goat, the tree of life, or bird wings. Rather, they embody a comprehensive form and meaning derived from all three. The process of sequential repetition of these early Eslimi patterns, based on the scroll spiral (Alpha) rule, formed the band of elementary Eslimi patterns (A – number 5), which bear a strong resemblance to Sasanian stucco work (Image B). Other similar works found in the stuccoes of Samarra appear to be copied from Sasanian works. The combination of the symmetrical spiral's rotation around a plant (early Khatayi) also, following this process, formed the band of early Khatayi patterns (Image A – 6). A color analysis of the work indicates that the spirals' rotation is drawn based on a circular rule and still differs significantly from contemporary Khatayi patterns.

Table 7: Continuation of the evolution of the ibex horn into early arabesques (eslimi) and khata'i during the Islamic period (Authors, 2024). ►

	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  (1) </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  (2) </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  (3) </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  (4) </div> </div> <p>Early <i>eslimi</i> (arabesque) motifs, resulting from the combination and fusion of the three symbols (ibex horn, sacred plant, bird wings), which guard the plant symbol of life from the sides.</p>
<p>A: Darreh Shahr (Lakpour, 1398: 213).</p> 	 <p>(5)</p>
<p>B: Sasanian stucco found in Damghan (Zamani, 1390: 139). Comparison with a similar Sasanian example.</p>	<p>Repetition and sequence of early <i>eslimi</i> motifs, resulting from the combination and fusion of the three symbols (ibex horn, sacred plant, bird wings) based on the scroll (alpha) spiral.</p>
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;">   </div> <p>(6)</p> <p>Repetition and sequence of early <i>khata'i</i> motifs, resulting from the combination of the ibex horn symbol rotating around the sacred plant, based on the scroll (alpha) spiral.</p>	

**Table 8:** Image (A) and its analyses in images (1) to (4) display various beautiful Eslimi and Khatayi patterns within the design. However, at this stage, Eslimi and Khatayi patterns still originate from one another and do not possess separate structures. In the course of evolution and transformation, the animalistic identity is still emphasized in some motifs, and semi- Eslimi patterns appear as effigies of hybrid animals (Image: A-1). These effigies are frequently seen in other works from Dareh Shahr, the stuccoes of Samarra, Chāl Tarkhan, and generally in the decorative motifs of the early Islamic period (Image F). As the structure of motifs tends towards abstraction in later periods, the iconic properties of Eslimi and Khatayi gradually disappear, and they emerge in a separate structure known as Tash'ir.

Image (D) is a fusion of rotational spiral symmetry (cross-like) and early Eslimi patterns. In the design of this stucco, the Eslimi patterns are placed within one medallion (or seal), and the Khatayi patterns within another, thus separated from each other. The evolution of this fusion process with the cross-like geometric structure in later centuries leads to a transformation in the spiral structure of Eslimi patterns. A significant point here is the fusion of the meanings of the medallion/seal, including light, radiance, and life, with the meanings of the constituent symbols of the Eslimi patterns. Image (E) is a continuation and evolution of Image (A-5 in Table Seven). In Image (F), the story of Eslimi patterns resulting from the fusion of the three ancient symbols flanking the tree of life is repeated.

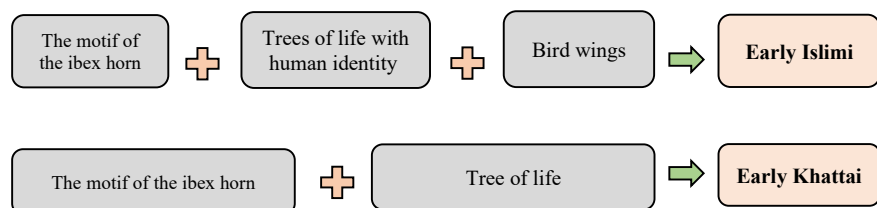
In the analyses of motifs (1) to (3), the thought and perspective of Samarra artists in creating early Eslimi patterns through the fusion of Sasanian and ancient Mesopotamian art are evident (Nazari-Arshad, Ghazizadeh, and Heidari: 1403). A characteristic feature is the creation of design structures that overlap the wall surface. Of course, the initial form of this structure was examined in Sasanian art and the preceding tables. This structure, combined with compositions based on geometry, astronomy, and philosophy, gradually forms the pillars of traditional Iranian-Islamic design. The difference between traditional Iranian-Islamic design and that of other Islamic lands lies in the masterful use of this structure to convey profound concepts of Islamic mysticism, which, due to the limitations of the present text, cannot be further elaborated.



**Table 8:** Continuation of the evolution of the ibex horn into early arabesques (*eslimi*) and *khata'i* in the Islamic Period (Authors, 2024). ►

		<p><b>B:</b> Darreh Shahr (Lakpour, 1398: 275). <b>C:</b> Darreh Shahr (Lakpour, 1398: 273).</p>
<p>Types of early <i>eslimi</i> and <i>khata'i</i> that have branched out from each other, with some motifs having an iconic (figurative) quality.</p>		
<p>Fusion of early <i>eslimi</i> and <i>khata'i</i> with rotational spiral symmetry (swastika or "Mehr" wheel); <i>eslimi</i> and <i>khata'i</i> have separated from each other.</p>		
<p>Evolutionary process of early <i>eslimi</i> that repeat and alternate based on the scroll (alpha) spiral.</p>		
		<p><b>F:</b> Samarra, Iraq stucco, caliph's residence, Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld, 1911-1913, <a href="https://www.alamy.com">alamy.com</a></p>

Based on the discussions and analysis of the tables:



Early Eslimi patterns, resulting from the fusion of animal motifs with sacred plants that possess human identities (such as: Mashy and Mashyaneh, Cypress, Asurik, etc.), are presented in the aforementioned diagram. Despite having different forms from the initial symbols that constitute them, the fundamental structure of none of these symbols has been lost. Consequently, contrary to the views of archaeologists and

scholars of Islamic art (Ghirshman, Pope, Dieulafoy, Wilber, etc.) who introduce Eslimi as a plant-like entity branching from the Tree of Life (Pope, 1959: 173-174); Eslimi is a composite entity with an animalistic-human structure, whose roots lie in ancient mythologies and whose meaning has been recreated in each era.

Khatayi patterns are also formed from the fusion of the sacred Tree of Life with a symmetrical spiral, which signifies the goat's horn, and its plant-like structure, alongside the horn spiral, is still preserved. In the process that has occurred, the horn spiral tends towards becoming plant-like, with horns and leaves growing from it, so that Khatayi patterns become more symbolic of the sacred Tree of Life.

At this stage, after thousands of years, we again encounter two symbols, each of which is an ancient myth with millennia-old meanings and life. Eslimi with an animalistic identity and Khatayi with a plant-like identity. Motifs and symbols in new periods and cultures insist on preserving their form and meaning. Therefore, to maintain their existence, they are constantly combined or fused with other symbols, or they replace symbols with similar meanings. The protective goat horn reappears in Eslimi to continue its life, and it always circles and guards the ancient Asurik tree, which is manifested in Khatayi patterns.

Further research and studies are needed regarding the evolution of the meaning of the protective goat and the Asurik tree with the form of Eslimi and Khatayi. However, it might be said that the nightingale's love for the rose in classical Persian poetry and texts, and the art of "Gol o Morgh" (Flower and Bird), are among their semantic and visual manifestations.

**Table 9:** In image (A), early Eslimi patterns are placed on either side of the Tree of Life, similar to protective goats. This same structure is maintained at the base of the scroll spiral (alpha). The Eslimi band (in the protective role) moves through the Khatayi band, sometimes to one side of the flower and sometimes to the other, embracing both sides of the flower in each corner. The stucco work at the entrance of Pir-e Bakran repeats and sequences Eslimi and Khatayi patterns at the base of the evolved symmetry of the 'Medallion of Light' (Mehr) and its fusion with the ancient Tree of Life. This is the manifestation and essence of motifs, symbols, and ancient myths that have been recreated with Islamic concepts.

**Table 9: The Formation of early Iranian-Islamic design structures, Eslimi and Khataei Motifs (Authors, 2024). ►**

<p><b>A:</b> Design from stucco work, Tepe Sabzpushan, Nishapur, 4th century A.H., National Museum (Islamic).</p> <p>Repetition and sequence of early Eslimi motifs on both sides of the sacred Tree of Life</p>	
	<p><b>C:</b> Design from stucco work, Pir-e Bakran complex, Isfahan, 703-712 A.H.</p>
<p><b>B:</b> Design from stucco work, Pir-e Bakran complex, Isfahan, 703-712 A.H.</p> <p>Evolution of early Eslimi and Khataei tendrils, integration of Eslimi and Khataei at the base of the scroll spiral (alpha), the continued life of the ever-protective goat horn in the appearance of Eslimi, which always revolves around and guards the ancient Sarv (cypress) tree manifested in Khataei motifs, at the base of the scroll spiral.</p>	<p>The continuation of the ever-protective goat horn's presence in the emergence of Eslimi, which always revolves around and guards the ancient Asurik tree manifested in Khataei motifs.</p>

## Conclusion

The motif of the goat in the prehistoric and ancient periods of Iran held considerable significance, embodying themes of fertility, rainfall, water-seeking, and protection. This motif represents one of the oldest symbols of the ancient world and is associated with the moon and the swastika. The goat motif maintains a close connection with the constellation of the Asurik tree, and thus, in most depictions, the goat or its horns are shown as guardians of the sacred Tree of Life. In the visual representations of this myth, the goat and the plant are rendered in realistic, stylized, and abstract forms. In many prehistoric motifs, particular emphasis is placed on the goat's horns, which are often combined with rotational spiral symmetry (the symbol of the swastika) and the broken swastika (svastika or hook-cross), thereby integrating the symbols of the moon and the Tree of Life. On the other hand, the goat defends itself or others using its horns rather than its body. Therefore, the significance and identity of the goat reside

primarily in its horns. Consequently, in the process of abstraction, its body is gradually omitted, leaving only the horn or horns, which are consistently positioned adjacent to or revolving around the plant symbol. This motif is evident in Elamite and Luriṣṭān art as composite animals, appears in the capitals of the Achaemenid period as two-horned composite creatures guarding a lotus-shaped column, and is repeatedly sequenced in decorative reliefs.

In ancient civilizations, motifs were not categorized according to plant or animal types, and composite creatures were prevalent in historical designs and patterns. For ancient people, the existence and symbolic significance of a motif were paramount, rather than whether it depicted a plant or an animal. Consequently, many combined motifs were created from animals, plants, and humans; these motifs were gradually abstracted over time and simultaneously fused with other symbols. The fused motifs then underwent further abstraction and fusion. This iterative process continued until the motifs fully evolved. During the Sasanian period, this process culminated in the fusion of the goat motif and the sacred plant with the symbol of bird wings, creating a unified emblem. The evolution of this emergent motif, derived from the goat's horn in the Sasanian period, can be traced across a wide spectrum and categorized into two groups: Early semi-Islimi patterns emerged from the fusion of the goat's horn, the sacred Tree of Life, and the Sasanian spread wings, and from their subsequent evolution.

Early Khatayi patterns gradually developed from the combination of the goat's horn and the sacred plant arranged in a symmetrical (Archimedean) spiral revolving around the plant, following the same evolved structural principles.

From the fusion of early Eslimi patterns (resulting from the fusion of the three ancient symbols) with the scroll spiral (alpha), the early Eslimi bands are formed. From the fusion of early Khatayi patterns (resulting from the combination of the goat's horn and the sacred plant), early Khatayi bands are formed. And from the fusion of early Eslimi and Khatayi patterns with the rotational symmetry of the swastika or the 'Medallion of Light' (Gir-do-gardoun-e Mehr), the initial geometric structures of Eslimi and Khatayi take shape. These structures, with the growth and development of mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and Islamic mysticism in the middle Islamic centuries, evolved to ultimately achieve the coherence of Iranian-Islamic design art (traditional design).

Although the abstract form of Eslimi originates from the evolution of the goat motif and its horns, combined and fused with the sacred plant and the wings of mythical birds; it has preserved the vital elements of its constituent symbols throughout its evolution. Eslimi is a form that can be attributed to any of its constituent symbols, while being neither a goat's horn, nor a plant, nor a bird's wing. Eslimi is an animalistic composite (mythological) entity—even though one of its roots is botanical, the sacred plant refers to plant myths with human identities—and Khatayi patterns have a plant-like identity. Since ancient symbols continue to exist through combination, fusion, or replacement with symbols that have similar meanings; the mountain goat symbol is manifested in Eslimi patterns and always revolves around Khatayi patterns (as a replacement for the Tree of Life). Consequently, Iranian-Islamic design (traditional design) is the repetition and sequence of the Asurik tree constellation and its guardian goats, which have been recreated in Islamic art.

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### Observation Contribution

The authors hereby declare their adherence to publication ethics in citations and affirm the absence of any conflict of interest with any individual or governmental body.

### Conflict of Interest

The Authors, while observing publication ethics in referencing, declare the absence of conflict of interest.

### Endnote

1. Source: (Doostkhah, 2013: 703). The Vendidad, or originally Vidēvdāt, deriving from the Avestan term *vī-daēva-dāta* meaning “laws against demons or evil,” is one of the five nasks of the present Avesta. Its primary content constitutes the penal law of ancient Iran. The Vendidad is among the most deep-rooted and fundamental motifs of Iranian religious mythology, comprising 22 fragards (chapters), (Doostkhah, 2013: 646).

2. Source: (Bahar, 2016: 81). The “Bundahishn” or “Frab-i dādagih” is one of the most prominent historical and religious texts of Zoroastrianism, written in the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) language. This work was composed in the late Sasanian period and redacted by “Farhang Dadagih” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century



AH. The “primordial creation” or “foundation” is what the “Bundahishn” signifies, with the book’s content divided around three axes: the initial creation, the description of creations, and the genealogy of the Kayanian dynasty (Bahar, 2006: 5-6).

3. Source: (Dooſtkhah, 2013: 435). “The Bahram Yasht is considered the fourteenth Yasht of the Avesta. This Yasht has been composed in celebration and praise of ‘Bahram,’ the great god of victory and warfare, the vanquisher of aggressors. ‘Bahram’ appears in Pahlavi texts as ‘Warharan’ or ‘Warhran,’ and in Avestan, as ‘Verethraghna.’ The Bahram Yasht is considered one of the martial sections of the Avesta, and its precise translation is considered a difficult task by many researchers” (Moradi Ghiasabadi, URL3).

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## پژوهشی در تکوین و تحول نگاره کهن بز در نقوش تزئینی هنر ایران (از دوران باستان تا قرون میانه اسلامی)

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### چکیده

نقش مایه بزکوهی از قدیمی‌ترین نقوش کاربردی در هنر جهان باستان به شمار می‌آید و جایگاه ویژه‌ای نیز در هنر ایران داشته و در بیشتر صخره‌نگاره‌ها و غارنگاره‌های باستانی و آثار پیش‌ازتاریخ در اشکال واقع‌گرا، تلخیص‌یافته و انتزاعی دیده می‌شود. بی‌تردید چنین نقشی که حاوی معانی حیاتی زاینده‌گی، زندگی و حفاظت بوده و تا پایان دوره ساسانی هم‌چنان پرتکرار است؛ در دوران اسلامی نیز تداوم می‌یابد. پژوهش‌های بسیاری درباره انواع نقش بز در مناطق مختلف و دوره‌های تاریخی انجام شده، اما در هیچ‌یک روند پیدایی، تحول و یا تطوّر آن بررسی نشده و هنوز نقوش حاصل از تطوّر آن در دوران اسلامی مشخص نیست. این مهم که سیر تکوین و تطوّر نقش بز و شاخ‌های مؤکد آن در هنر ایران باستان چه روندی داشته و دارای چه مضامین هنری بوده و بازآفرینی آن در هنرهای دوران اسلامی چگونه تداوم‌یافته و دارای چه مفاهیمی بوده است؟ و کدام‌یک از نقوش دوران اسلامی حاصل این تطوّر و دگردیسی هستند؟ از مهم‌ترین پرسش‌هایی است که در پژوهش حاضر سعی شده به آن‌ها پاسخ داده شود. روش تحقیق توصیفی، تحلیلی و براساس تطبیق نقوش است. نمونه‌های انتخابی از نقش‌های بز و شاخ‌های آن و نقوش تزئینی در هنر ایران باستان تا دوران میانه اسلامی مورد مطالعه، ترسیم و تحلیل قرار گرفتند. نتایج به‌دست آمده از تحلیل و تطبیق نقوش نشان می‌دهد نقش بز که همواره در کنار درخت مقدس زندگی (اشاره به منظومه درخت آسوریک) قرار دارد، ابتدا در شاخ مارپیچی آن خلاصه شده و سپس با گیاه مقدس زندگی یگانه می‌شود. این تلفیق به مرور با بال‌های پرندگان نیز می‌آمیزد. نقش تلفیقی حاصله از نمادهای سه‌گانه شاخ بز، گیاه مقدس و بال‌های پرندگان در دوره ساسانی، اسلیمی‌ها و ختایی‌های اولیه را به‌وجود آورده‌اند. شبه‌اسلیمی‌ها و شبه‌ختایی‌ها با ساختارهای هندسی تقارن چرخشی مارپیچی گردونه مهر (چلیپا) تلفیق شده و در دوران اسلامی به‌صورت اسلیمی و ختایی تکامل می‌یابند.

**کلیدواژگان:** نگاره بزکوهی، شاخ بز، اسلیمی و ختایی، نقوش تزئینی، ایران باستان.

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