
A Study of the Interior Furniture and Decorative Motifs of Achaemenid and Sassanid

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Abstract: This study reviews two types of Persian interior furniture; court furniture such as chairs and beds, also known as thrones and Persian rugs, through an examination of taxonomy; their general types, structure, and decorative patterns, which were used in two important Pre-Islamic era in Iran; Achaemenid (530-330 B. C.) and Sassanid (224 to 651 A. D.). This topic is investigated to increase the understanding of the maturity of the Iranian interior furniture industry. Its symbolic system is also explored, which was based on animal and plant motifs, to consider the function of elements and symbolism on Iranian interior furniture. Extant evidence of high-level furniture and rugs in these periods have only remained in the form of artworks, wall carvings, and the traditional stories. Both rugs and high-level furniture were used extensively as luxurious items by the ruling classes and as such are the only sources that are considered here in this study. This surviving evidence shows how the ruling classes influenced the historical development of Iran's interior furnishing designs in both wood and carpet forms.

Keywords: Furniture, Interior Design, Motif, Achaemenid, Sassanid

1. Introduction

The early history of furniture in Iran evolved from basic flooring seating using animal skins, which progressed to the use of woven carpets. However, this does not mean that there are no other types of furniture evident. The first known finding of developed furniture was revealed from the second millennium B. C. through the documents of archaeological discoveries (Cheshmeh Ali archeological expedition 1934-36), that indicate furniture became an important and long lasting possession for the Persian's citizen, not only as a functional object, but more importantly as a signifier of social status and power [3]. The type of furniture placed in an interior setting was viewed as an indicator of social status. The extent of the area as well as the diversity of cultures and ethnic groups in Persia according to furniture usage is beyond the scope of this article. This paper has attempted to review the most important key aspects of the two afore mentioned influential Kingdoms, Achaemenid and Sassanid, by examining their style, cultural design and the social status

of their furniture.

The evolution of rugs and high status furniture begins at different starting points. The rug develops through the influence of cultural, whilst its position in Iran is rooted in the art of Persia. In contrast, the high status furniture has influence from imported and imitated western culture. There are many publications that represent national art (such as: Persian Carpet, (2016), E. Najafi & M. Beheshty - Aesthetics in Iran Handmade Carpet [28], N. Daryai), and a limited number that focus on high status furniture [3]. Due to the lack of original and surviving works of the pre-Islamic era in Achaemenes and Sassanid time, these periods have been considered as a difficult era to study both high status furniture and the rug in any depth.

Before the entrance of Islam, the attention for woven rugs of ancient Iran goes to two carpets; Pazyryk carpet attributed to the Achaemenes which is known as the starting point [17] in the history of woven rugs in Iran (550-330 B. C.) and Baharestan rugs from the Sassanid time that only a description of its beauty and material value is mentioned in books like Tabari history [18], which provides the history

from the time of Qur'anic Creation to 915. However, in addition to these carpets, high status furniture can be seen illustrated on carvings and artwork decorations, such as Sassanid metal works. This form of visual reference is the only surviving source available to scholars and this study.



Figure 1. Pazyryk, Attributed to Achaemenid. Source: <https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki>.

1.1. History of Domestic Furniture in Iran

Although interest in oriental rugs has been evident for many years, it is not clear how exactly high-level furniture found its way into Iranian life, as little extant objects survive. A basic assumption that may be considered is that it could be through the relation with outsiders, which brought their culture and beliefs into Iran through trading. Whereas, in contrast with the renowned Persian carpet which is a folk and ethnic art that employs visual bilingualism (symbolism from painting and ornaments) which satisfied the cultural interests of people with shapes, forms, and colors [7].

In the historical debate of furniture in Iran, its main difference with other countries is the multi-dimensional definition of the word "furniture". In Iran, furniture, before its contemporary and global meaning, which mostly points to functional structural types (seating, working, storage; chairs, tables, cabinets), defined itself broadly as cushions and rugs (as illustrated in remaining art works), and probably with only a few pieces of simple higher level wooden furniture, such as stool and chair in the homes of ordinary and court people, since the majority of evidence shows the existence of those types in palaces.

The very first evidence of carpet weaving attributed to Persia, according to the speculations of archaeologists, is the carpet Pazyryk with the elements of Persepolis, such as winged griffins, horses with riders [12]. In Sassanid time, which is known for its extensive colorful silk fabrics that opened the business doors between Iran, China and the West, where the importance of rugs was not neglected as much [20]. The result of business relations between the Sassanid government and the Byzantine Empire, as well as the religious influence of the government [5] brought Sassanid motifs into Byzantine art with a dramatic effect; Symmetrical composition, and use of Sassanid plant motifs in Byzantine art, especially during the era of symbolism.

Pakbaz [15] provides a description of magnificent rug

design of the Sassanid such as Baharestan royal carpet woven of silk and jewelries. The beauty of Sassanid rugs weaving was so universal that it was even mentioned in an old Chinese calendar (510-617) which identified the existence of carpets among Iranians during Sassanid times [3]. Later in the book of Tabari history [18], a luxurious carpet called the Baharestan carpet (also known as Bahar Khosrowis) was described and noted as the Sassanid royal carpet. This carpet uses gold as its most striking color, as Persian art recognizes gold as its most important color. This Sassanid elite art had a strong influence in the later Islamic era of Iran [7].

With our perception of modern furniture, it is difficult to recognize these early forms as wooden furniture, since the surviving evidence represented on the Achaemenian wall carvings and Sassanid metal works presents them as quite different to contemporary types (see figures 2~7). The study of these depictions of modern furniture provides evidence of the social status of the user. The forms, structure and decorative elements represented support the notion that high-level (modern) furniture was common among society elites and high-ranked authorities.



Figure 2. Sasanian Metalworking with the peacock design, Source: <https://iranatlas.info/sassanid/sassanid-art.htm>.



Figure 3. The image of the Sasanian king among the dishes, made in the seventh century A. D., Source: www.raeeka.wordpress.com.



Figure 4. Image of the Shah and the Sasanian princess at the Art of Walters Museum, Period: Sassanids from the 6th and 7th centuries AD, The presence of the horn of the ram on the king's throne, Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sasanian_art.



Figure 5. Khosrow I sits on the throne, Walter Museum of Baltimore, Source: www.architecturenew.blogfa.com.



Figure 6. Plate with musician figures. Source: www.fa.wikipedia.org/wiki.



Figure 7. The throne of the Sasanian shrine is protected by legendary creatures. Source: www.architecturenew.blogfa.com.

1.1.1. In-door Furniture Before and After Islam

The history of ancient Iran may be divided into three periods; Pre-Historic (circa. forty thousand to eighteen thousand years ago) found in south-east of Iran [3], around the cities of Kermanshah, Khorramabad, Marvdasht and Kashan currently known as historic cities; pre-Islamic era during powerful kingdoms like Median, Achaemenian, Seleucids, Parthian, and Sassanians (known for its beauty, variety, time of real graphic, real creativity and creation); and finally, Islamic time started from Safavid kingdom [14].

The presence of different forms of seats from a simple, small structure such as stools to chairs and thrones come from the surviving evidence from 4,000 B. C. in Iran. The very first images of furniture made in ancient Iran's boarder during the Elamite era are shown on many cylindrical seals in the form of stools and simple chairs with backrest (Figures 7~8), which represents the idea of this furniture type being used by high status figures [3].



Figure 8. Lady spinning and her maid, Elamite time, Shush area, Iran. Source: fa.wikipedia.org.



Figure 9. Babylonian stele, Shown an Elamite king sitting on stool form furniture, 1184 to 1155 BC, Source: Louvre museum.



Figure 10. Two Cylinders from Sush, Sukkalmah dynasty, Source: Louvre museum.



Figure 11. Two Cylinders from Sush, Sukkalmah dynasty, Source: Louvre museum.

The presence of wooden furniture in Iran before and after Islam, like any other countries, depended on the demographic of the individual. The extant examples of art works illustrate the use of wooden-furniture, which seems to be the monopoly of the Royals. It was not until the Qajar and Pahlavi eras that this luxurious element slowly became common in middle and higher-class homes [3]. From this, it is understood that Iranian's homes were commonly covered by rugs, when sitting or sleeping on the floor was a customary habit [20]. Nevertheless, the importance of the

role of carpets in the lives of all Iranians should not be overlooked. Rugs, besides their daily use and artistic view, counted as family capital. Rugs would be regarded as part of the family estate, would have legal implications at death, having financial as well as cultural value. The existence of a rug among in a domestic dwelling was a signifier of the household income and social status. For these reasons, the best Persian carpets were woven for palaces and mausoleum [23] Furniture was no exception in this matter and among the high-class families, wooden furniture was exhibited in the form of armchairs, tables, beds, stools, and so on [3]. However, it was also used to fulfill the essential needs of a typical ancient Persian family. For example, it was used in the form of a box for clothes and other essentials, and a simple form as stool and chair [6].

1.1.2. Design Style of Achaemenes and Sassanid

When the powerful kingdom of Achaemenian came to power (circa. 550-330 B. C.), their art was biased on the status of the Kings. To present this by combining the art of the various Achaemenid tribes [16] they promoted their art, which resulted in an abstract, symbolic form of plants and animals. However, at this time, the arts of the neighboring countries were mostly associated with the world of the dead [1]. Achaemenid art kept its vibrant and lively style, and freeform initiative. Observing the figures sitting on the illustrated chairs, and considering the types of clothing, hair arrangement, and their surroundings, the high social status of this furniture among the high-ranked Achaemenid can be recognized. These seated figures are mostly depicting the ceremonies and royal visits in the capital (Figure 13) [3]. For instance, the woman in figure 12 may be a princess or a queen, or Achaemenid Kings presented in figures 13 to 15 are centered figures that show advanced high-level furniture of its time. What is significant is the use of short stools along with illustrated chairs on the carvings. By looking more closely at these images the extended front legs of the chairs are noteworthy as they were designed to raise the occupant's position, which requires the presence of the stool. In other words, the seat height of the throne is higher than the seat height of a domestic chair elevating the occupant to show importance.



Figure 12. An elite woman is sitting on a high-level chair with her legs on a stool and holding a lotus flower. Her dress is Achaemenes's garment with a crown form and a veil on it. Source: www.fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/.

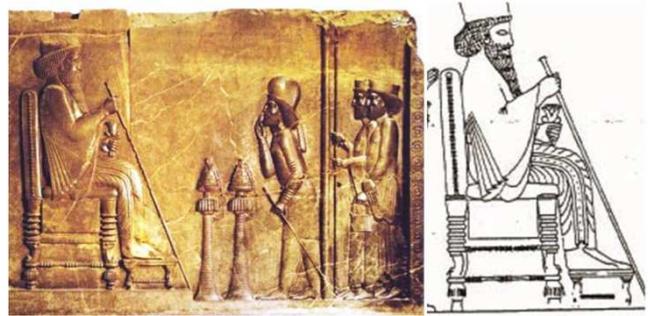


Figure 13. Persepolis carving, Iran, Source: www.fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/.



Figure 14. Persepolis carving, Iran, Source: www.fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/.



Figure 15. Achaemenid carving found in Egypt, Source: www.utop.news/hashtag/acamenid_empte.

The role of women in the Achaemenid period evolved. In comparison with previous kingdoms, their duties were limited. However, women were able to find a way to retain their political and cultural influence. For instance, most of the marriages at that time were political [22]. In terms of design features figure 12 shows the differences between the design structures of the chairs used by the king in figures 13 to 15; the female figure is seated on a smaller chair with a lower backrest than the king's chair. Although, figure 12 shows more decorations which could reflect the taste and tact of the designer in showing the social position and gender of the user. Mentioning that this was not just in Iran, comparing with China, for instance, designed chairs for women also presents detailed decoration for this period (Figure 16).

Since high-level furniture was mostly used for the Kings activities, they were probably made of high quality wood with elegant decorative patterns. The remaining evidence of

Achaemenid furniture also points to the use of animal parts like claws being applied to the legs of king's throne, which continues in later dynasties, such as Sassanid [2].

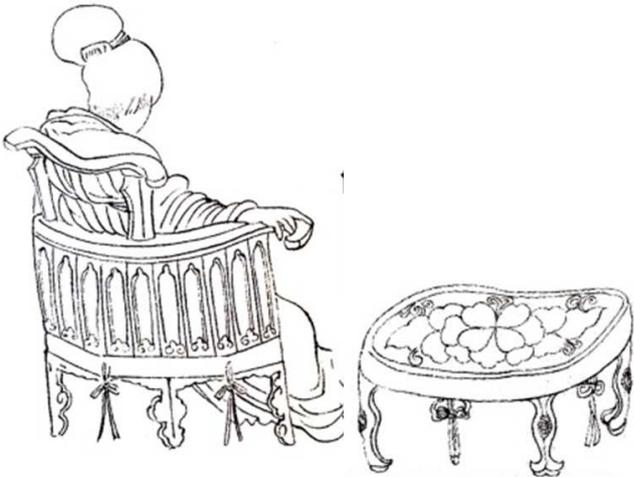


Figure 16. Tang princess seating on a chair with low backrest and detailed design, and Tang dynasty stool used by women, Source: Xiong Juan, Liu Xian-bo, 2015, *Research on Tang Dynasty Furniture*, Hubai Social Project Science, China.

Because of the fire in Persepolis in 480 B. C. [27], everything including wooden and non-wooden furniture was destroyed. The high quality of the small part of a woven product of Achaemenes clothing that survived the fire demonstrates the presence of quality carpets or the possibly a furniture covering as a valuable alternative woven product [12].

Xenophon the Greek historian (431-351 B. C.) in his book *Cyropaedia*, mentions the city of Sardis, which was under the rule of Achaemenid and was proud of its carpets. He also noted that Iranians had such carpets that would ruin easily and only the shah (King) could walk on them [17]. The existence of Pazyryk could reflect the development of Iranian carpet weaving skill as the turning point in the history of Iran's carpet and the world. A square carpet with the pictures of riders, animals, legendary animals with eagle's head and lion body, and floral borders [3].

The Sassanians (224-651 A. D.) saw themselves as the inheritors of the Achaemenid (550-330 B. C.). So that, the culture of the king's throne with its animal elements (Figures 3, 5, 7) was continued by Sassanid emperors. Ansari in his book *Deco* (2012) describes the throne of Sassanid king as gold, and silver made seats for courtiers [3]. While Vaziry [20] pointing out Sassanid kings embroidered on the royal throne are engraved on silverware [20]. The most well-known, large, and high-level throne attributed to Khosrow Parviz II which was called the "Taghdis throne" (590 A. D.). There are four rugs explained to decorate the Taghdis throne that were molded with pearls and rubies illustrated the four seasons [26]. In this period, just like Achaemenid, there are no surviving examples of rugs. However, woven carpet in Chinese documents are mentioned as a commodity imported into China during this era [25].



Figure 17. What is engraved on this plate is consistent with the Roman soldiers' report of the Taghdis throne. Source: Reza Abbasi Museum.

Among ancient references, books of *Shahnameh* like Demotte (around 1330s) provide some forms of high level furniture which used as throne and beds in the court, during the Islamic era of Ilkhanid (Mongols 1256-1335) and the Timurid empire (1370-1506). Rugs can be observed in most of Demotte's illustrations, which reflect the kings' interest in carpet (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Demotte *Shahnameh* (*Book of King*), *Mourning the dead Iskandar (Alexander the Great)*, Freer Gallery of Art and *Enthroned ruler*, Louvre. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Mongol_Shahnameh.

The turning point in the field of rug design and production is seen in the Safavid era. Prior to this there are no remaining examples of carpet. Safavid carpets show the revival of art in Iran. The valuable examples of the Safavid carpet made in the greatest workshops of that time, which are currently in the world's museums like Carpet Museum of Iran, Metropolitan and Philadelphia museum of Art. Wooden furniture, however, leaves no extant examples from pre-Islam until the end of Safavid time. To understand the design and the position of wooden furniture in Iran before and after Islam the books of *Shahnameh* are the most and valuable sources (Figure 19) where depictions of furniture are illustrated in these volumes.



Figure 19. *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasb, Safavid empire, Some examples of wooden furniture in safavid era. Source: Museum of Shah Abbas, Tehran.*

Carpet exports to the European countries that peaked in the Safavid period, continued until the Qajar kingdom too (1909–1925). It was during this period that the elegant Iranian carpet changed with the taste of foreign customers, such as carpets that were copies of French design [17]. Many Great and stunning thrones such as The Marble throne, Sun throne, and Naderi Throne, were made during the time of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar which decorated with fascinating jewels [3]. Later, during Naser al-Din Shah Qajar time (1848-1896) furniture was also given as gifts to the court from trading countries such as India and Europe [21]. Qajar kings and ambassadors who travelled to Europe changed Iranians indoor greatly influenced design taste. These new interior decorations mostly came with the influence of European style, exported high-level furniture [3], and Iranian rugs in a new form of modern and international life style introduced to Iran, which has survived to this day.

1.2. Methods

This research investigating the rug and wooden furniture has used two separate types of research method. There is considerable literature available on the Persian rug, in the form of journal articles and monographs. In contrast, compared to rugs, high-level furniture in Iran has been mainly ignored. The history and development of rug design has been recorded through visual representations in paintings and surviving examples of rugs. However, wooden high-level furniture has limited sources such due to very few examples from earlier periods surviving. Examples of early furniture are only available in the form of carvings from ancient time and paintings that show types that were used by Kings and courtiers.

This research is done in a descriptive-analytic way using primary and secondary sources with its data having been gathered through desk research and archival resources. Images were collected from books of miniatures from Shahnama and the extant objects located in the national museum of Iran and the Louvre museum, France.

2. The Aesthetic of Pre-Islamic Persian Furniture

Persian art, as in other eastern arts, has a mythic aspect.

Throughout the periods from the pre-Islamic to Islamic era, this aspect of art has exhibited various reminders of myth and supremacy. By examining the history of Iran, it is understood that, this part of Iranian art before Islam was referred to the status of the Shah (the king) as both the God representative and the human official as the second power on the earth. Later, with the entrance of Islam, God's role has become the spiritual component of the thought of designers, while the king's position embraces the physical part of culture and designs. This way of thinking is reflected in all decorative elements highlighting the designers' intention.

2.1. Persian Wooden Furniture

The very first forms of beds appeared in Pre-Islamic time. There are many items known related to this period, but not all these documents and objects have been in evidence. Most of them are read from painting, sculptures, and reliefs. As mentioned earlier, most information about furniture in pre-historic time come from visual documents like the ones referred to above and belong to seals found in Sialk hills, Kashan (Figures 7~10) that show human figures seated on a legged chair. This chair probably is the oldest version of its type and still has influence on design today. These simple stools give the impression of being constructed of wood, with some evidence to support the use of wood as the main materials used in the furniture of that era. Wood is known to have been used at this early period as employed in constructions by native Iranians since 4200 B. C. Many wooden objects found in the city cemetery in Shahr-e Sukhteh (5000 B. C.) are evident which could be a possible birthplace of Iranian mosaic art [23] decorated with Iranian mosaic technique [6]. Additionally, in Achaemenid and Sassanid wood was used abundantly in war, agricultural affairs, shipbuilding and housing [21] The images of the furniture used by the Achaemenid king on the carvings decorated with woodcarving, which is a sign of the high value placed upon the arts of engraving and woodcarving (Figures 11~15). Later than Achaemenian, the use of wood increased in the construction of buildings and tombs. Especially in the Islamic era, wood was considered to be the primary material in the construction and decoration of mosques [6].

2.2. Persian Rug

The Persian carpet is an historical and cultural identity of Iranians. This decorative woven product that has come to rever man's position has always tried to maintain its originality and while keeping its Iranian identity, has global influence.

Persian carpets, whether in the form of rural designs or city workshops from past so far, have always been the subject of international attention for their aesthetic values, such as colour, pattern, and quality. In Iranian tradition, the practice of creating a Persian carpet is the result of two human dimensions: inner effects and outer effects. The inner dimension comes from the artist spiritual conditions, which

are influenced by factors such as culture and religion. The outer dimension embraces the effects of society, economy and so on.

One of the characteristics of Iranian art is to use the method of repetition and multiplication. As, a single motif could have its visual and artistic position, repeating it on the surface could be bold and develop its semantic beauty. This style has been widely applied on carpet design in both rural and urban workshops. The only difference between these is how motifs are repeated throughout carpet. Based on Pazyryk before having carpet workshops in cities, design elements used to be put individually in one direction and eyes unconsciously created a hypothetical conjunction line in the mind like the current rural carpets.

Carpet design is an applied art that uses symbolism. Iranian art has always tried to show the influence of religion, culture and environment through designed motifs. With the use of symbols, the Persian rug brings the gnosticism and the spirit of nature into people's lives which bridges the inside and outside worlds. Forms of symbolism are represented in abstract and repetitive forms. Repetition in the minds of the Iranian artist comes from the repetitions in nature, such as days and nights which is completely different to the Western mindset of Pythagoras. An abstraction, however, comes in the form of single motifs and symbols in the Persian carpet, completely drawn from the artist's lifestyle and environment taken from plants, animals and so on [19].

2.3. The Influence of Symbolism in Persian Art

Man-made crafts like rugs and wooden furniture could form and produce the inner minds of man manifesting into a real object. The meaning of a sign or symbol would find its Semantic value along with other signs. In addition, to create a new meaning, a group of symbols need to sit together [13]. Symbolism helps people to express their social needs, and beliefs to communicate this to the intended audience, no matter what their own beliefs are from their inner self, from other people, or from god [19].

In Persian art, a motif, in a single or combined form, maintains the relationship with the whole, and at all times attempts to harmonize and highlight the overall picture. A motif, apart from its aesthetic dimension, generates a broader concept derived from Persian tradition and culture.

From the Leroi gourhan perspective, nomads used animal or plant symbols to be protected sometimes using the mysterious forces of nature. Through time, these symbols changed to be more abstract forms among rural people, as a result of the decline of mythical thought and the beginnings of urbanization [9]. This notion applies to the creative process used to make Persian rugs. This was also applied later to high-level furniture's design where motifs were created using this thinking. Iranian furniture design was affected by the transfer of production to urban centers, where manufacturing processes were employed to increase productivity. This reduced the influence of the makers' mindset, in the urban interior, designers used nature motifs from the past, as well as the influence of social occasions and

national religion which are shown through the employment of symbols. However, rural art continued to produce visually appealing items that maintained its position as an independent art. The slight differences in these design patterns used among rural and urban people can be seen as they were used to decorate both rugs and high-level furniture in Iran [22].

3. Symbolic Concepts Used in Motifs

"Symbols" in human social life are instruments of social interaction. Symbols and myths speak on behalf of human beings and express deep, profound and mysterious words in a symbolic way. Symbols, in addition to expressing profound meanings and its separation from visual meaning have also helped to represent the status of human status. In the following section, the important symbols that the Achaemenid and the Sassanid had on their furniture and rugs are reviewed.

3.1. Achaemenid Rug and High-level Furniture Symbol Study

The rug is an art form that is susceptible to damage through misuse and degradation through inappropriate environmental conditions and insect attack. Pazyryk as the only surviving source of Achaemenid carpets, fortunately, had been preserved by the cold weather in the location where it was discovered in [12]. In Iran (from ancient time so far), religious beliefs were considered as an appropriate context for the growth of symbols, and Pazyryk as the very first carpet known as a Persian rug is one of them [8]. In Pazyryk Mithras and Aryan patterns (pre-Islamic religion) griffin, horse, horned moose illustrated in full figure which completed by the shape of lotus flower (as a holy pattern) which shows that Pazyryk had not been woven for daily use, but was produced for a Royal temple. Use of animal figures or their body parts, and flower motifs were common in the Achaemenid time, as there is vivid evidence of them in the surviving Persepolis's carvings encountered on contemporary furniture. Based on these carvings, the general structure of Archimedean beds and thrones may be described as straight and long lines decorated with curved and circular decorations (Figures 11~16) [17].

3.1.1. Lotus

In pre Islamic art, plant symbols were often symmetrically presented. The lotus flower (also known as the Niloofar flower), in Pazyryk carpets was presented in the form of eight sharp petals (Figure 20). The lotus flower comes with a rich background and it had been represented before the Achaemenid [17]. This pattern is seen on the bowl, and plates in Tepe Sialk [3]. This unique design was used more than any other decorative pattern for the Assyrian kings, becoming associated as a royal sign (Figure 21). In Persian art, the lotus flower is closely related to both the Mithraism and the ancient Iran. In the beliefs of ancient Persians, the god of Anahita was the source of all waters on the earth and was the

source of fertility for all phenomena [24].



Figure 20. Lotuse flower from Pazirik and a wooden chair. Source: <https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki>.



Figure 21. Lotuse flower from Pazirik and a wooden chair. Source: <https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki>.

3.1.2. Horse

Since conquest and war was a common in ancient time, the presence of the horse was one of the basic needs for victory. The horse that accompanied the warrior on his ride to the end of battle became a respected symbol on the Iranian rug. The horse represented the power for kings and warriors (Figure 22). Pope believes that, the horse in Mithraism reflected “the sun” [16], while McCall [11] explains this motif as the ‘physical embodiment of the Gods.’ However, the main traits of the horse figure may be associated with, strength, beauty, tolerance, bravery, gratitude, and intelligence [4].



Figure 22. Horse motif. Source: <https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki>. Griffin (Shirdal in fari).

The griffin, is a mythical form of the body of a lion, the head of an eagle and the ears of a horse (Figure 23), presented as a symbol of a power. The griffin is an

extraordinary and vigilant symbol in Iran's mythological culture. Acheamenid emphasized the griffin's strength in guarding and protecting against evil [4]. The griffin in the Pazyryk rug design is placed inside a square to emphasis the animal's peaceful character (Figure 1). The square is a symbol of stability, calmness and represents the quadrangularity of the world. It can further symbolize the protection and care of a ritual parade, which is often depicted in Pazyryk rugs, located on the outer edge of the carpet.



Figure 23. Giriffin motif. Source: <https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki>.

3.1.3. Lion Claws

The lion represents power and fire, it is also a symbol of purity, courage and readiness to sacrifice for its ideal. The role of the lion is repeatedly shown on the carvings of Persepolis. However, in the carvings of the king sitting on his chair, it comes with the design of paws of the lion, which are employed in the lower part of the chair legs (Figure 24). Although this motif may represent many explanations, its relation with the Iranian goddess Anahita may give the king the role of guardian [23].

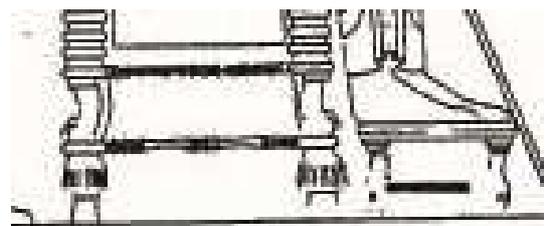


Figure 24. Claws applied on the throne legs. Source: <www.fa.wikipedia.org/wiki>.

3.2. Sassanid Rug and High-level Furniture Symbol Study

Sassanid furniture (224 to 651 A. D.) is commonly incorporated into the pictorial design of one of its decorative art, metallurgy. Most of the metal in this period is made of silver, and the designs found on it include scenes of royal kings and royal aristocracy, scenes of ceremony, coronations of the king, as well as female figures [10].

Sassanians valued art where they displayed their creativity in designing and constructing magnificent buildings and palaces. Their great appreciation and knowledge of the

aesthetic forms of decoration are reflected on their furniture designs. Surviving silver plates of that period illustrate that the Sassanid furniture industry might be identified as having the first changes to the structure of seats, shifting from a single seat to a bed structure. Due to the influence of the Achaemenid art, bed legs decorated with animal's figure or a part of them can be seen in the artefacts, such as claws (Figure 22). The illustrations (Figures 2~7) depict a cushion on the bed for the king to lounge upon. This form of furniture viewed from the front elevation maybe seen in contrast to the Achaemenes carvings, which show the thrones from the side elevation. The illustrations further show that the decoration of furniture additionally uses semi-precious metals as well as expensive fabric covers, which were common (possibly derived from the Achaemenid period) [3].

3.2.1. Eagle

The eagle was perceived as being related to the gods of heaven and earth, from the ancient times. This positioning is associated with the sun and carries rays of the sun bringing salvation to every human being. The eagle is the highest ranked symbol for Ahura representing the sun or the heavenly fire. It is the only creature that dares to look directly at the sun without its eyes burning. In all civilizations there is always a place for the eagle to accompany the greatest gods. The symbol of the eagle represents those who have a high spiritual status (Figure 3).

3.2.2. Ram

The ram has a great value in Eastern civilization symbolizing embodiment, dignity, vigor, and also represents the symbol of the sun. In the book of Avesta (book of Zoroastrianism, 1323 C. E.), the ram and its intricate horns (Figure 5) are referred to as one of the signs of victory and is also associated with having royal qualities [8].

3.2.3. Wings

Among the Sassanid motifs, wings are one of the most important symbols taken from the Achaemenid winged figure [4]. Wings generally are the symbol of flying. In eastern art, wings are known as the symbol of light of the spiritual figure. The wings were not easily obtained, but were accessed at the expense of self and soul-cultivation. The presence of wings among any creatures reflects their particular association with the Gods (Figures 3, 5, & 7 shows a four-legged animal [probably a ram] with a wings).

4. Conclusion

During the Achaemenid era, except for the palace of Persepolis and several tombs there was nothing-physical left of the interiors of that period to study, such as their types of rugs and high-level furniture. The only documented options available to examine wooden furniture are visual documents like books and wall carvings. Reviewing all these can provide the design evidence but not the type of material used. The carpet weaving of that era is no exception, and the 2500 year-old Pazyryk carpet is the only one that could be cited here, although, this carpet

itself is enough to represent the Achaemenid advanced rug woven and decorative designs system.

As a result, by reviewing their beliefs system, it is clear that these visual design elements were influenced by their belief in the power of legendary creatures, religious background, and lifestyle. Their design system in both kingdoms used mythical animals like Griffin to represent a king's power and position. Some animals such as the horse was rooted in the importance of this animal in people's lives. The plant motifs used by the Achaemenid such as the lotus flower, as seen in the example designed in the center of the Pazyryk rug is a symbol of ancient Mithraism.

Sassanid art observed Achaemenes design although, it could not reach the Achaemenes Stone industry, where indigenous materials were commonly used. There is no documentary evidence to identify the type of material used in the construction of furniture of this period too. As a result, it is beyond the scope of this paper to establish the use of specific types of materials for furniture production. The depictions used as sources here are found on extant artefacts made from metal, stone and glass. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the materials used for furniture production are likely to be organic and therefore perishable with low durability as compared to the surviving artefacts constructed from metal, glass and stone. In terms of design motifs, the paper establishes that the Sassanid period used more animal pattern in its decoration like mythical animals, such as the ram with wings. It may be suggested that flying had a special position among the Sassanians due to the winged animals and birds that were commonly depicted and used in the decoration of kings thrones.

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