

THE SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS USED IN TRADITIONAL IRANIAN EMBROIDERY

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The recognition of the culture, identity, art and especially handicrafts of every society is of special importance, therefore, the recognition of Iran's modern history and unique culture and the Iranian society is also related to the recognition of its art and artistic works, and they are expressed in the best and most beautiful way by Iranian women. The History of Iranian Embroidery shows that Iranian art and culture, including handmade arts and crafts, have undergone many changes for thousands of years, but they have never lost their Iranian identity and roots. In this article the meanings of symbols and patterns used in Iranian embroidery have been presented and their Iranian origin has been discussed.

Keywords: Embroidery, Symbolism, Mythology, Barsam, Khatayi, Eslimi

Symbols reflect people's thoughts, dreams, and ideas about their surroundings, the universe and the world. The semantic and pictorial field of the symbol is so wide that Jung notes that the history of symbols shows everything can acquire a symbolic meaning, such as natural phenomena stones, plants, animals, or man-made objects, such as a ship, car, or abstract images such as numbers. In fact, the whole world is a potential symbol³.

Handicrafts, in addition to artistic and consumer characteristics, also express the taste and skill, and culture of the creator and artist. Embroidery, which is a separate branch of handicrafts, is also called embellishment or

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³ Yung, Ensân va Sambolhâyaš, 15

decoration of the fabric surface. Many symbols and patterns are used in the art of embroidery, the most important of which are plant, animal, and human images, geometric shapes, elements of nature, mythical, and religious phenomena. These patterns have certain differences in each region and tribe, which are due to the climatic features, living conditions, and common types of embroidery in the given region. Inspired by their creative mind, imagination, environment and, tribal beliefs, the women of different Iranian tribes sewed beautiful patterns on fabrics and clothes using colorful threads and created valuable works that reflect the unique and ancient culture of Iran, and at the same time played a significant role in the world of Iranian culture.

The types of Iranian embroidery have different cultural meanings and roots in terms of symbols (symbolism). Recognition of the art of embroidery can bring out the hidden and undiscovered layers of meaning of culture and beliefs, and characteristics of different Iranian tribes, which are manifested in different types of embroidery.

Although, the signs and symbols of Iranian embroidery have been discussed previously in Iran, in this article, for the first time in Armenia, we examine the signs and symbols used specifically in needlework from symbolic, ethnographic, cultural, and economic perspectives and try to find the ones, which are purely Iranian.

Pomegranate and Pomegranate Flower

The Pomegranate is a sacred fruit in almost all religions and has many meanings. In ancient myths, mythology, and art since prehistoric times, the pomegranate has been endowed with grandeur and occult significance. In Iran, the pomegranate and the pomegranate flower have a long history in Iranian art and literature, the roots of which go back to the worship of the god Mihr and the goddess Anahita. In Persian language the ancient name of the pomegranate is "Narbela" which means pomegranate flower, and it was also the name of one of the wives of the Achaemenid King Darius, one of the Iranian queens. In the petroglyphs and rock carvings left from those days, we see a Narbela (pomegranate flower) in the hands of the king and the prince.

In symbolological and mythological theories, the pomegranate, because of its multiple grains, primarily embodies the secrets of fertility, procreation,

fruitfulness, and abundance. In the Zoroastrian religion, the pomegranate was also considered sacred and was used during religious rituals and ceremonies⁴. The pomegranate branch or "Barsam" was considered a ritual element of the Zoroastrian religion. The pomegranate in that teaching symbolized eternity and the perfection of nature.

In Iranian mythology, Esfandiar becomes an invincible hero after eating a pomegranate. In classical and modern Iranian literature and poetry, the pomegranate features prominently and is associated with religious beliefs. Thus, the pomegranate and the pomegranate flower have a special and profound meaning in Iranian art and were also reflected in Iranian embroidery.

"Boteh" and "Jeqqeh" (Paisley- Almond Shape Ornament)

"Boteh Jeqqeh" (paisley) is one of the ancient symbols of Iran, which originates from the beliefs of Iranians. The word "boteh" means bush in Persian. Throughout history, images of poplar, pear, sycamore, fire or bird wings have been used for Boteh (bush) ornament. Boteh has three motifs: vegetable, animal, and natural elements. In ancient Iran, trees, especially the poplar, were considered sacred, because the poplar is evergreen, therefore its monochromatic and monotonous nature is associated with the character and nature of Iranians. Apart from that, the slender and upright height of the poplar symbolizes another characteristic of Iranians. With all the upheavals of history, the Iranian nation has never bowed its head and stood noble and steadfast like a poplar. Botanically, it resembles a pear or an almond. These two fruits have great nutritional and medicinal value. The hermits could endure hunger by eating only one almond a day. On the other hand, pear also has high medicinal value and is considered a heavenly fruit. The other name of the pear is "Amrud" or "Amret" (ret or maret literally means death, and the preposition "a" is a negative preposition, which, added to the word, means immortal, immortal⁵). From the point of view of the natural elements, "Boteh" symbolizes Zoroastrian fire. This ornament is also very similar to a drop of water, and water is also one of the elements of nature. "Boteh" also

⁴ Āhangarī. and Hoseynī, Barresiye Tasire noqūše Sāsānī bar taz'inate mehrabe masjede jam'e Orumiye, 61.

⁵ ūshidrī, Dānešnameh Mazdāyasna, 430.

has an animal motif because it resembles a feather or a bird's wing, which symbolize indescribable and fantastic power in myths. In the world of myth and mythology, the lion and the bull are depicted as winged, embodying supernatural power. Historical figures were often depicted with wings, for example, Cyrus, the founder of the Achaemenian Empire, was depicted with a coat and wings.⁶ The Persian word "Jegghe" is explained in the dictionaries as follows: 1. A plume 2. A crown or a crown-like device placed on a hat 3. A sculptural ornament worn by men on their robes or hats, and by women on their headdresses. Thus, "Botteh" is a sign of glory and pride of Iranian kings, which was placed on the crown like an ornament, giving more shine to their authority and distinguishing them from others⁷.

"Eslimi" and "Khatai" leaves (Circular Composition and Meandering Floral Motifs)

The ornament and motif of 'Eslimi' is the living presence of the garden and flower garden in Islamic artwork. The harmonious lines and beautiful and precise curves of this ornament catch the eye of every beholder. There is an opinion that the name "Eslimi" is derived from the word Islam, and since this motif was often used in Islamic artwork, including tile work and "Tazhib" (illustrations of religious and manuscript scrolls), it experienced a rapid rise during the Safavid period, then entered Iranian art. It is also said that these patterns are taken from the Kufi type of manuscript, but these opinions seem implausible as the roots of these motifs are older and pre-Islamic. In the samples and excavations found at Persepolis, we find simple forms of these patterns, which underwent changes in later historical stages. After Islam, since human images and portraits were not used or were rarely used, instead of them, "Eslimi" and "Khatai" patterns were developed, which why many thought that these motifs were introduced after Islam. in Iranian art "Eslimi generally provides decoration both in the form of plant images and in the form of geometric inverted lines. That pattern is expressed in the work with its rhythm, weight, and at the same time maintains a close connection with plant patterns, and although it appears to have moved away from nature, it is again connected

⁶ Giršman, Honare Irān dar dorāne partī va Sasanī, 128.

⁷ ZamanKhodāi and Karimī and Yarahmadī, Negāhi be Seyre Tahavvol va Namadinegīe Botteh va Jeqqe, 123.

with the meanings of food and abundance."⁸ According to sketch experts, "Eslimi" is a drawing of a tree, with all its twisted branches and leaves, which is why it is a rough pattern. As for the Khatai motif, it is a bush motif, more subtle and thin. The origin of this name and word is not clear. Some connect the name khata to the region of "Khata" in Eastern Turkistan, which was also mentioned in Persian literature, and others, because of the different spelling of this word connect it with the words "wrong" and "deviation" and interpret that it means: an ornament of wrong, crooked and oblique lines. It seems that the second explanation is closer to the truth, because the artist creates motifs in his mind, inspired by nature.

Nowadays, this beautiful pattern is used to decorate the table cover and the 'Sajjade', the cloth spread for prayer.

Tree of Life

One of the widely used symbols in Iranian art, especially in embroidery, is the tree of life. The tree has been considered sacred by many nations and religions and has also been considered a symbol of man and his dreams. Man, like a tree, has a root and identity, and like a tree, always strives to grow, flourish and blossom. Just as a tree changes in different seasons and has different cycles so a person goes through different stages from birth to death and starts all over again, withering and rotting. Due to these similarities, we can consider the tree as a symbol of human life. This metaphorical image has many mysteries in it, stretching through the thick foliage and branches and shedding the sheaves on the ground of various myths, religions, arts, literature, and civilizations⁹. Among the most important meanings attributed to the tree throughout history have been the concepts of birth, life, and eternity. The tree also embodies symbols of space, prosperity, science and eternity¹⁰.

Red Rose

In Iranian culture, the characteristics of plants, beauty, fertility, or sterility were interwoven with certain concepts and became motifs and symbols¹¹. The use of the red rose in Iran dates back more than 2,500 years,

⁸ Burekhārt, Honare eslamīe zabān va bayāan, 72.

⁹ De Beaucorps, Ramzhāye Zendeye Jahān, 8.

¹⁰ Hal, Fārhang-e Negārehīe Namadhā dar Honare Šarq va Qarb, 285.

¹¹ Kafščiān Moqaddam and Yahaqqī, Barresiye Anāsore Namādin dar Negārgariye Irān, 71.

with Zoroastrians using dried rose petals and rose water for many rituals and festivals, including Nowruz and Mehregan, as well as weddings. During these rituals, they washed their hands and face with rose water, drank rose water syrup, and sprinkled rose water on each other. The word "Rose" is mentioned several times in the Avesta. The red rose also has a special meaning in Iranian literature. Since the red rose has deep roots in Iranian culture, the image of the rose has been used in Iranian handicrafts, including embroidery. The rose symbolizes beauty and love, mysticism, and light.

"Shah Abbasi" Flower (Night Flower)

One of the patterns used in Iranian embroidery is the "Shah Abbasi" floral pattern. The name Shah Abbas suggests that perhaps this pattern was introduced to Iran from the time of King Shah Abbas, but we also see this flower pattern in monuments and sculptures of the Achaemenian period. In the various sculptures of Persepolis, we see that the flower of Shah Abbas is quite similar to the palm flower, that tree symbolized fertility during the Achaemenid period, because the date palm satisfied all human needs. A palm pattern similar to the flower pattern of "Shah Abbas" was used on the seals of Darius and high-ranking courtiers, the treasurer, and the master of ceremonies, indicating the special importance of this ornament.

This floral motif was used in the stucco art of the Blue Mosque of Tabriz, which belonged to the Timurid dynasty, but because it was frequently used in the main motifs of carpet weaving during the reign of King Shah Abbas, it got that name. In the embroidery works, the floral design of "Shah Abbas" is complemented by Eslimi drawings.

"Niloofare Abi" (Lotus or water lily)

In Iranian mythology, the lotus was called the flower of Anahita. Nahid also expresses the meaning of freedom and libertarianism in Iran. Because of Nahid's association with water and the lotus, that flower symbolized creation. In Zoroastrian beliefs, the lotus is the symbol of Ahuramazda. it is a bust of a man, sometimes distributing kindness (good) with his hand, sometimes holding a lotus flower or the ring of the law between his fingers (Khvarenah)¹².

¹² Izadparast, Giāhe Lotus tā Eslimī va Khatāī, 59.

During the Achaemenid period, one of the reasons for the importance of plant patterns and motifs, including the lotus, was that Iran's climate is dry and hot for most of the year, and flowers only open in spring. In addition to the murals of Persepolis, we also see this floral motif on pre-Achaemenid Silk patterned pottery from the third millennium BC. This proves that the lotus has been considered a sacred flower at various stages of Iranian history, which is why it has always been used in Iranian artworks such as architecture, tiling, glazing, and embroidery.

The "Hum" Plant (Haoma/Ephedra Plant)

Ephedra is a plant that grows in the mountains, and it is used in religious rituals. "In the Avesta, the word *dūraoša* has always been used as an adverb for hum, which is composed of two particles: *dūra* (meaning "dure" or far) and *auša* (meaning destruction), so it means removing destruction, therefore removing death. It was for this reason that *dūraoša* syrup was translated as syrup of immortality¹³. For centuries, Zoroastrians have used the ephedra plant in their worship rituals.

Rooster

In the beliefs of Iranians, especially Zoroastrians, the rooster is one of the most important birds the divine messenger "Sorush". In the Avesta, the rooster is called Parvardesh and means diviner, and forecaster, because he sees Mithra and the dawn before everyone else. Sorush is God's agent, he guards God's creatures in the darkness of the night, he is the enemy of sleep, Bushasia the devil who prevents people from waking up from sleep and going to Mihr before sunrise and praying. In ancient times, people believed that evil thrives in the dark, and the rooster chases them away with its early dawn call, heralding the coming of light¹⁴. That was the reason why in Zoroastrian belief everyone had to have a rooster at home. Some textiles from the Sassanid period show a halo around the cock's head, perhaps symbolizing its sanctity, as divine beings were adorned with halos in mythology. In ancient Iran, killing a rooster was considered impolite. In Iran's Mazandaran province, the rooster is still revered, especially if it is a white rooster, avoiding killing it.

¹³ Latifpur and Mazdāpur, *Giyāhe Hum va Naqše ān dar Āyyinhā va Asātire Hend va Irāni*, 204.

¹⁴ Akhavan Moqaddam, *arresiye Zorūfe Sāsānī az Didgāhe Namādsenasane*, 104.

Peacock

The peacock has a special meaning in Iranian culture. Its Persian name is "Farash morgh" because it spreads its tail and wings on the ground like a colorful carpet. It also symbolizes the Persian kingdom and royal throne. In ancient Iran, the peacock was considered the bird of Nahid and was believed to have eternal life because it drank from the immortal water. In the Zoroastrian religion, the peacock was also considered a sacred bird. During the Sassanid period, this beautiful bird pattern was depicted on textiles and works of art, often featuring two peacocks under the tree of life, expressing the duality of human nature. Islam states that the peacock originally resided in Paradise, but because it helped Satan deceive Adam and Eve, it was expelled from Paradise. This is why Islamic artwork often features a peacock motif, especially on the front door of mosques and on prayer rugs, as it is believed that the peacock recognizes the devil and will not let him enter. We see the peacock motif in many fabrics and embroideries of pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Iran.

Fish

The fish holds an important place in Iranian culture and beliefs and has also been expressed in works of art and literature. In the Avesta, two fish were appointed by Ahuramazda as guardians of the Gukaran plant. Ahriman creates a frog in Lake Farakhkard to carry the white ephedra plant, but Ahuramazda appoints two Minu fish guardians to guard the plant¹⁵. A fish lives in water, and its life and existence are directly dependent on water, because of this close connection, the fish has acquired a sacred meaning. The motif of two swirling fishes is widespread and frequently used in Iranian artworks.¹⁶ From ancient times to the present day, Iranian art lovers and masters have used the fish symbol in their various creations as a sign of good, daily earnings, fertility, and conception. The fish symbol was also used in embroidery, especially in the Zoroastrian period.

Cross ("Chelipa")

The teaching of Mihr is one of the oldest Iranian beliefs. "In the Iranian mind, Mihr is the god of light, the symbol of order and alliance, accuracy

¹⁵ Āmūzegār, *Tārikhe Asātir-e Irān*, 33.

¹⁶ Fārs, *Asmāne Šhab*, 30.

and truth, the all-seeing overseer of the world, and the patron of creatures. This teaching was formed even before the Mazdean sect of the Zoroastrian religion. In Zoroastrian tradition, Mihr has a lower rank than Ahuramazda. The "Mehrisht" chapter of the Avesta book is dedicated to this goddess. Mihr is seen before the sun, and accompanying the sun, its meaning is combined with the meaning of the sun¹⁷. Thus, we can say that the sign of the cross is the symbol of the crossing of Mihr and the sun, whose earthly representative is fire. The oldest samples of this emblem were found during the excavations of Old Shush, which belong to the fourth millennium (BC). The earliest evidence of the mutual connection between the cross and the fire can be found in the tomb pits of the Achaemenid kings in the historical complex "Naghshe Rostam" in Fars province, where a ritual scene of sun worship and worship is depicted on top of each king's tomb. The cross pattern and motif are widely used in Iranian embroidery, especially the Baloch type.

The diversity and prevalence of traditional embroidery of Iranian nationalities show that this hand art is widely used throughout Iran. The meanings of the symbols used in most of the embroideries are very similar to each other and clearly express the unity of the different Iranian nations. The patterns and symbols used in embroidery are taken from tribal and religious beliefs, the surrounding environment, the plants and animals of the region, and geometric figures. Based on the study of these symbols, we conclude that the motifs and symbols of Iranian embroidery come from the history of Ancient Iran and have Iranian identity and roots.

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Նունիկ Դարբինյան¹⁸, Փաթեմեհ Էսմայիլ Ռամաջի¹⁹

Յուրաքանչյուր հասարակության մշակույթի, ինքնույթյան, արվեստի և հատկապես ձեռագործ աշխատանքների ուսումնասիրությունը առանձնահատուկ կարևորություն ունի, ուստի հնամենի պատմություն և

¹⁷ Nafisi, Tārikhe Tamaddone Irāne Sāsānī, 95.

¹⁸ Նունիկ Դարբինյանը ԵՊՀ արևելագիտության ֆակուլտետի իրանագիտության ամբիոնի ասիստենտ է, բանասիրական գիտությունների թեկնածու Էլ.հասցե՝ noonik.darbinyan@ysu.am ORCID [0009-0003-5186-874X](https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5186-874X)

¹⁹ Փաթեմեհ Էսմայիլ Ռամաջին ԵՊՀ արևելագիտության ֆակուլտետի իրանական պատմաբանասիրության մագիստրատուրայի շրջանավարտ է, Էլ. հասցե՝ tonekabon50@gmail.com ORCID [0009-0009-8304-9830](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-8304-9830)

յուրաքանչյուր մշակույթ ունեցող Իրանի և իրանական հասարակության ճանաչումը ևս փոխկապակցված է նրա արվեստի և գեղարվեստական ստեղծագործությունների ճանաչման հետ, իսկ դրանք լավագույնս և ամենագեղեցիկ կերպով արտահայտություն են գտել իրանցի կանանց ձեռարվեստի մեջ: Իրանի պատմությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ իրանական արվեստն ու մշակույթը, այդ թվում ձեռագործ արվեստներն ու աշխատանքները հազարավոր տարիներ շարունակ կրել են շատ փոփոխություններ, սակայն երբեք չեն կորցրել իրենց իրանական ինքնությունը և արմատները: Սույն հոդվածում ներկայացվում են իրանական ստեղծագործության մեջ կիրառվող խորհրդանիշների և նախշերի իմաստները: Քննարկվում է այն հարցը թե դրանք որքանով են գույտ իրանական և ինչ գաղափարներ են արտացոլում:

Բանալի բառեր՝ ստեղծագործություն, սիմվոլիզմ, աշխարհագրություն, Բարսամ, Խաթայի, Էսլիմի

СИМВОЛЫ И УЗОРЫ, ИСПОЛЬЗУЕМЫЕ В ТРАДИЦИОННОМ ИРАНСКОМ РУКОДЕЛИИ

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Знание культуры, самосознания, искусства и особенно ремесел каждого общества имеет особое значение, поэтому познание Ирана и иранского общества, имеющего древнюю историю и уникальную культуру, также связано с познанием его искусства и художественных произведений, которые нашли самое лучшее и красивое отражение в рукоделии иранских женщин. История Ирана показывает, что иранское искусство и культура, в том числе ремесленное искусство и произведения, за тысячи лет потерпели множество изменений, но никогда не теряли своей иранской идентичности и корней. Искусство рукоделия не является исключением в этом плане. В данной статье представлены значения символов и узоров, используемых в иранской вышивке. Обсуждается вопрос, насколько они являются чисто иранскими и какие идеи отражают.

Ключевые слова: вышивание, символизм, мифология, Барсам, Хатайи, Эслими

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