



Studying the Identity of *Nishapur* during the First Few Centuries of the Islamic Era through the Design of the Household Items: with an Emphasis on the Symbolic and Mythical Symbols of Ancient Iran, Sample: Household Earthenware Belonging to the Early Islamic Era to the Fifth Century AH*

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ABSTRACT: Identity is one of those symbols which are influenced by variety of factors. Since civilization and culture consists of physical and spiritual manifestations left behind by the mankind throughout the history, the tools and the items used by them becomes extremely important when studying their culture. By studying the symbols and the myths which are reflection of the people who used these items, one could gain insight into how these symbols and myths influenced their design. In this paper, it has been tried to take a look into determining the association of the ancient Iranian myths and symbols with the design of early centuries of the Islamic Era household objects in Nishapur. In other words, the main goal of this study is to bring into light the role and the influence of the ancient Iranian myths and symbols, which originated from Nishapur's geographical location and climate and was manifested in design and processing of the household objects. The hypothesis of this research is: the ancient Iranian symbols and myths have influenced the design of the household objects during the early centuries of the Islamic Era. To examine the hypothesis, first, Nishapur's geography reviewed, and then, the household dishes, during the aforementioned centuries, are briefly introduced. Finally, through introducing samples, the ways the ancient symbols and myths have influenced the design of these objects have been analyzed. Majority of the ancient symbols and myths have been inspired by the natural elements, especially, water, fire, animals and plants. For example, designs off fish, Anahita, Lily, and goat-antelope are just a few of the designs which not only were part of the myths and the symbols of the ancient Iran, but also have been used in designs after Islam and are grouped with the symbols associated with water. Moreover, symbols such as the story of Siavash, Izad Soroush, up-pointing triangle, lion and circle are concepts which have been designed in association with light and fire. Ultimately, the influence of the ancient beliefs on design of the household dishes during the early centuries of the Islamic Era in Iran in four groups of symbols, geometric, plant, animal and human were analyzed.

Keywords: Ancient Iranian Symbols and Myths, Nishapur, Nishapur's Household Dishes and Pottery, Early Islamic Centuries.

INTRODUCTION

Identity is formed by the norms and beliefs of a society. Culture history and culture has a great influence

in forming these norms and beliefs. In some societies this impact is much deeper and concrete than the others. A society usually stays faithful to such norms and beliefs. According to Stewart Hall, identity is not a phenomenon

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which is formed in advance. In his opinion, Identity is something that is formed every moment in time and it never becomes complete (Berger, 2000, p.47). Meanwhile, how the ancient symbols and myths are shown and reflected in the items used by people on a daily basis finds a great importance. In many of the traditional arts of the past, some kind of connection with the nature, the physical world and the divinity is observed; as if, when the designer achieves artistic and industrial creativity, forms a connection between himself and the creator. Perhaps, it could be said that the importance of the role of the symbols and the ancient Iranian myths in their life is so much that has led to the formation of a society in which believing in myths and symbols was a vital part of their daily life and art and life were as one. In such a society, people's beliefs were reflected in the objects which they used in their daily lives. Perhaps it could be said that the symbols and the myths are taken from the natural elements which impacted their lives, and people believed in special powers in these natural elements and that is why their symbols and the myths have found a great importance. In this paper, it is tried to offer a reason why these symbols and myths are combined with the design of the household dishes in Nishapur of the early centuries of the Islamic Era.

The hypothesis of this study is that the ancient Iranian symbols and myths have influenced the design of the household objects during the early centuries of the Islamic Era and that the city of Nishapur, due to its size and importance in these centuries, holds an important place when studying the design of the household objects during those centuries.

The goal of this research is: study of the importance of Iranian symbols and myths in the design of the household dishes in Nishapur of the early centuries of the Islamic Era.

RELATED LITERATURE

Due to the topic of the study being an interdisciplinary one, it is tried to gather the information from a large number of history and art books. Despite the fact that many books exist on the history of this era, the emphasis and attention to the issues which are influential on designing objects, especially the household dishes, are very few. The content of this section has been obtained from a very little information on the household dishes in many history, social and art books. In response to the question, how could symbols and myths could be presented through the design of the objects? It could be said that all the objects in our environment possess certain forms which by affecting the psyche of the human being lead to their

understanding and perception. With respect to the fact that in the phenomenon of understanding an object one is seeking to establish a direct connection with it, Robert Goyer says, "connection is a method which guarantees at least four elements: 1. the producer who, 2. the sign or the symbol which, 3. offers to at least one receiver, 4. and he understands the meaning of that object" (M. Rad, 2003, P. 46). This phenomenon of establishing connection, related to the objects design, is as follows: 1. the designer; 2. the symbol on the object; 3. the user or the consumer; 4. the meaning which the consumer understands.

According to Vickstrom's theory, the semantic function gets the designer ready to establish connection with the consumer via sending clear message through the product. According to Krippendorff's theory, understanding the meaning of product is, ultimately, "study of the existing connection between the form which the designer has created and the meaning which the consumer creates (Krippendorff, 1997). Based on these theories, it could be said that the symbols and myths which people believe in, influences the object people use. Thus, in analyzing the objects, the basis of the designer's beliefs (myths and symbols) and those of the people who are going to use them must be considered. Perhaps, it could be emphasized that, "every artist speaks in the language of his Predecessors. It takes time for him to start speaking in his own way and language." (Hauser, 2003, p. 248)

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out using the historical-comparative and content analysis method. Based on the goal of the research, the nature and the method of study are historical and descriptive. Since in the qualitative studies the approach is interpretative and triangulating is emphasized, using the opinions of the researchers and credible documents, the specific and common characteristics of the ancient Iranian symbols and myths could be explained and studied. The source of the pictures were written documents and the method of gathering data was library research, written sources, oral, picture and digital. After the library research and identifying the different types of the household dishes used in the first five years of the Islamic Era in Iran, based on the experts opinion, the ancient Iranian symbols and myths portrayed by the design of the dishes and their connection with the designs were studied. The study was carried out to answer the following question: How have the ancient symbols and myths influenced the design of the household dishes in Nishapur?



Definition of the Key Terms

Symbol: Based on the experts opinions, “the symbol is something which related to another thing that gives meaning to it or represents it” (Guber ann, 1999, p. 24). Symbol is bestowing character and connotative meaning and its power originates from multiplicity of its specious meaning (Hauser, 2004, p. 63). According to Hall 1983, putting it simply, symbol is something that is used in another things place and refers to it or represents it.

myth: a traditional or legendary story, usually concerning some being or hero or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, especially one that is concerned with deities or demigods and explains some practice, rite, or phenomenon of nature (leek, 2006). Mythology is the science of studying ideas represented by forms (Bart, 2005, p.35). According to Campbell, myths are like picture glossary of connection, a connection which originates from within and from our inner energy and reaches into the realm of cognitive self-consciousness (Campbell, 2004, p. 11).

Design: since the shape of the product is first its communicative action (Pildych, 1980), form and decoration is needed to establish connection (Beheshti, 2003) and decoration and function are not separate entities (Behnam, 1964). What is meant by design in this study is the Manifestations of form and decoration of in the household dishes.

Household utensils: household utensils, due to the diversity of their functions, make up the main part of the household objects (Burdek, 2005). Since most people spend most of their leisure time in the house, due to the time spent and the relationship that exists in the kitchen, the objects in this part of the house possess great importance in connection with their user (Mohammadi Nazhad, 2002, p.6).

The Early Centuries of the Islamic Era

The method of information and data analysis is based on Raymond Kiwi’s book, research Methods in social sciences and is shown below:

Concepts: the influence of ancient Iranian symbols and myths on household utensils
 The Early centuries of the Islamic Era
 Degree of attention to the ancient symbols and myths
 Presence of many ancient symbols and myths in various household utensils
 Dimensions: using the ancient symbols and myths in household utensils
 Geometric symbols
 Plant symbols
 Animal symbols
 Human symbols

Identity and Its Relationship with Designing Objects, Symbols, and Myths

Identity is divided into two forms by Berger, identity of the objects and identity of human, which, both, have root in one concept ‘this’ is the same as ‘that’. In this case until the subject has not lost its characteristics and uniqueness, it could be said that it has a stable and constant identity. However, when these characteristics change and another way to compare it with other things, we talk about change of identity (Asa Berger, 2000, p.151).

In Iranian Art, one of the main elements is preserving and reviving self-consciousness of the Iranians. This was so strong that with Islam becoming the main religion of the land Iranian’s influence did not vanish in any shape or form. Instead, their work became, simply speaking, became the role model for the Islamic Art (Spuler, 1990, Volume II, p. 26). Three important and essential factors

play a role in the emergence of the great symbols such as national identity and ethnicity (purified from Ashraf, 2008, pp. 110-115):

The first factor is formation of large states and empires in which people of various tribes with one political and economic system hold a common political identity have. This system is the result of the victory of one tribe over the others. In such a system, usually, one of the families from the victorious tribe leads the rest. The second factor is the universal religions that spread from tribe to tribe and a great religious unit is created and lead to formation of a new identity. The third factor is the common language among various people and tribes that originates from a common culture. By looking at the ancient history of Iran, one could see the historical meaning of Iranian Identity in the ethnic, political and religious movements which faced and survived many ups and downs during the Achaemenid, Sassanid and Islamic Eras.



Reconstruction of the Iranian cultural identity period took place during the rule of the local Iranian dynasties which rule different parts of Iran after the Arab's invasion and collapse of the Sassanid Empire. It was after the invasion that many political, cultural and religious damages were inflicted upon the Iranian identity. The reconstruction of the Iranian identity which started during the first period of the Abbasid Rule picks up speed and momentum during the rule of the local kings of Iran, especially during the Samanid era and set the foundation of the Iranian cultural identity for the following centuries. Presence of the Sassanid forms and symbols could be seen in the eastern part of Iran up to the 4th century (Spuler, 1990, Volume II, p. 19).

The objects and the phenomena could always be considered to exist in two types of realms, external form and inner content (Naghizadeh & Aminzadeh, 2001, p.7), which both possess great importance when analyzing them; even though, these two are not totally unrelated to one another. For example, some of the relics from these centuries such as the pottery from the Sassanid Era, which mostly have been excavated from Nishapur, play an important decorative role. Arabic writing, influence from the two-colored Chinese pottery, the strong influence of textile with polka a dot design and picture of birds in circular frames, deer, flower, bushes, picture of hunters on the horseback, rulers sitting on their royal thrones, dancers among birds and animals are some of the designs on the pottery obtained from Nishapur (Naji, 2001, p. 65). The spiritual connection of the words and sentences which include the traditions and sayings about bread, means and the joy of giving is one of the characteristics of the art in this era which is not limited to mere decoration and contains meaningfulness of this art in it (Ahmad Panah, 2001, p. 5).

The true essence of myth is not thought, it is feeling and emotion. Its actual system is based on emotional unity not logical rules. In fact, the term follow had a much vaster meaning in the ancient world than the contemporary world. Following used to be a mythical way of thinking. Life pointed to a myth and utilized it. It was only through referring to the past that life could be perceived as noble and meaningful phenomenon (Campbell, 2004, p. 63). This goes to show that whenever wanted to present him, used the myths and their existence was a factor which bestowed inner peace upon him. The ancient people looked at everything as a living entity which had the power of life and changing the way of thinking. Mankind, as the result of wanting to shift the focus from him, creates an amazing phenomenon. He uses the myths to talk about his own identity crises, getting to know himself and his

inner problems and issues (Fasaie, 2004, p. 45). Myth guarantees that whatever it is that a human being wants and wishes to do, has been done before in a fairytale kind of way, and he only has to learn lessons from it and by learning about the myths, he could understand the secrets of being and existing (Fassaie, 2004, p. 68). The most important function of myth in Iliad way of thinking is bringing into light all beliefs and customs of the mankind, from marriage, nutrition to education and rearing and art (Esmael pour, 1998, p. 16). Myth talks about historic and sacred times and believes in the saying, "history repeats itself". Myth is something that instills hope, because it shows that, even, in hard and dire times, in chaotic situations and when staring despair in the face, there still is hope and salvation and there is a purpose for existence (Sattari, 1993, p. 70). Myth, for some reasons, is a part of the history of the mankind, because "it is the symbol of how the mankind perceives himself, his world and his progress. However, this is mostly true about the Iranian myths, because they mostly are about the creation and the world mankind lives in. the goal of the myths; however, is not merely to interpret the past. It, also, explains the present in a way that instills hopeful future and makes people trust the time which is to come (Hinlyz, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, external manifestations of the myths and their symbols have an undeniable influence on giving identity to objects and knowing them.

Introducing the Geography of the City of Nishapur

Nishapur or Nishabur is a city in the Khorasan Razavi province in northeastern Iran. It is situated in a fertile plain at the foot of the Binalud Mountains. Nishapur is located at the elevation of 3211 meters above sea level. The highest rainfall recorded in the province is in Nishapur (Dapper, 1992, pp. 30-31). It is considered as one of the most important tourist destinations, populated cities, and cultural centers, industrial and historic cities of northeastern Iran. In addition, it has always been considered as one of Iran's historical and cultural symbols.. The town derives its name from its reputed founder, the Sassanid king Shapur the first, (zarinkub, 1985) who is said to have found it in the 3rd century CE. The name, presumably, stems from *nēv-šāpūr meaning "fair or the good city of Shapur." Nishapur, for the first time during the Taherian period, and the second time, early in the Seleucids period was chosen as the capital city of Iran. (Hammuda, 2010). The turquoise mines which supplied the world with turquoise for at least two millennia are located near the city. Because of the turquoise, Nishapur became an important town in the



Khorasan region; however, its importance declined until the 9th century, during the Tahirid dynasty. This rise in its status, once again, was due to the glazed ceramics of Nishapur being an important item of trade with the west.

Little archaeology has been done on this vast and complicated site. George Curzon stated that Nishapur had been destroyed and rebuilt more times than any other city in the history. The Metropolitan Museum of Art started excavations in 1935 that were interrupted in 1940. Searching largely for museum-worthy trophies. The Metropolitan's publications were limited to Nishapur's ceramics. The site of Nishapur has been ransacked for half a century, since the World War II, just to feed the international market demand for the early Islamic artifacts. Overall, the pleasant climate, fertile soil, and rare and valuable ores, such as turquoise, copper, sulfur, salt and sheath, and its geographical location makes it the center of economic, cultural and commercial activities of the eastern region of Iran. All of these features had made Nishapur one of the biggest and most advanced cities of Iran and the world prior to the invasion of the Mongols. Before and after the introduction of Islam, it used to be a city in which many Iranian Christians and other minorities resided (Joneidi, 2004). The ruins and the remains which could be seen today around the current city of Nishapur, shows the ancient size of the city very clearly (Zanganeh, 1997). Blair 1992, calls it one of Iran's oldest and lasting cities which used to be on the path of the Silk Road.

Introducing the Ceramic Household Utensils Used In Nishapur during the Early Centuries of the Islamic Era from the First Century to the 5th Century AH (Research Samples)

Household utensils of Nishapur in the early centuries of the early centuries of the Islamic Era could not only be placed in the artifact group but also reflect other arts such as pottery, calligraphy, painting and literature. As the result of the quality images with rich graphics, utensils have found additional importance in the lives of the people from all walks of life. Some of the dishes were even ordered by the kings or were given as a gift to others. Here, the symbolic role of these dishes is very clear. During the golden ages of Islam, Nishapur used to be the center of ceramic and pottery industry of Iran. During the third and the fourth century, the art of ceramic was at its peak in Nishapur.

Ceramic is an ancient art which is said to have been found by the nations whose main activities revolved around agriculture. When they learned how to dominate the nature, they planted seeds and domesticized the animals. To store the seeds and to cook the meat, they gave

form to clay and heated it. This is how they made ceramic dishes (Zamani, 1976, p. 199). "To judge a nation's art, one should use its ceramic and pottery to pass a verdict on the delicateness of its people's emotions and feelings" (Reid, 2009, p. 24). Pottery making in Iran became more important during the Islamic era, because it was in this era that drinking or eating from and in gold and silver dishes was considered Haram (forbidden and detestable). "That's why the Pottery makers tried to perfect their art and even decided to make pottery that had golden luster" (Zamani, 1976, p. 200). Among the relics of this century, Nishapur's pottery have certain fame. They even come with Kufic writings on them. "asking God for another blessed day, patience, poverty and wealth, greed and contentment, blessing, joy, forgiveness and generosity, needs and wants, and thought and thinking, and free spiritedness are some of the topics that the writings on the pottery and ceramic works of art are about" (Ahmadpanah, 2001, p. 14). Especially in the Samanid period, "the Potters imaginations and their subjective perceptions of the nature decorate their works. They have tried to avoid mimicking and duplicating others' work. Perhaps, this is the way of most of the great artists (Vayh, 1984, p. 68). One of the features of the pottery during the Samanid period is that while they have functional use, they are, at the same time, decorative. Most of the pottery found in and around Nishapur is kept at the New York's Metropolitan Museum.

The Ancient Iranian Symbols and Myths Which Have Been Displayed on the Clay Dishes of Nishapur

If culture is considered to be a set of symbols and signs which people in a society use to communicate with one another, these cultural symbols and signs manifest themselves in people's social life in two forms. One is through the physical elements (tools and objects) and the other is non-physical elements (language and literature) (Berger, 2000, p. 54). Constant interaction between the mankind and his environment has always been one of the features of life in the Islamic Era (Aram, 1987, p. 233). In line with this, myth has acted as the guarantor of the active and functional force used to achieve social and cultural goals. Myths should be known as the stories which by using certain logic ease the meeting of the culture and the environment (Zamiran, 2004, p. 25). The traditional art has always benefited from the beauty and attractiveness of thriving nature and active human, and thus, sees anything that is useful in life beautiful (Madad Pour, 2008, p. 141) "Continuous interaction between the mankind and the natural environment has always been a



feature of life in the early Islamic Ages” (Pacific, 1987, p. 233). In Zoroastrianism of Iran, not only Ahura Mazda, who is the great creator, is praised, the Amshasbandan also are praised. Each one of Amshasbandan refers to a natural component and supports and maintains it as well: “fire, cow, metal, earth, water and plants, are a few of the things which are sacred in Zoroastrianism” (Hynlz, 2009, p. 93). Nishapur is one of the places that, due to its geographical position, have a special place in Persian literature and mythology. Therefore, many of the old customs are still interested in it.

The Symbols of Natural Elements (Geometric)

Some of the myths have had such powerful influences on human life that their symbols and meanings are very deep, such as the symbols of water, because water is seen as the source of life in every culture. These natural characteristics are the factors which influence human life. “Anahita is the Water goddess in the ancient religion of the Iranians. Riding on a chariot pulled by four horses: Wind - Rain - Cloud - Snow” (Hynlz, 2009, pp. 30-27). Wealth, blessings, and cold are all associated with water (Michel & Grub, 2000, p. 156). Water is a symbol of wisdom, as well. In fact, water is liquid light. We often speak of the light of knowledge. It is in this case that water inherits the feature of lights knowledge. “This is why it is believed that those who have achieved the light of knowledge somehow could walk on water” (Gvbran, 1999, p. 6). Since the ancient times, parallel and diagonal hatching lines have represented water and agricultural lands (Kiani, 2000, p.110).

“The Sun or the circle was the sign of Ahura Mazda’s greatness and in all the ancient relics, even at the center of the Kaviani Flag (Forouhar) which is the symbol of Iranian’s victory. This is so, because it was believed that circle or ring is the symbol of Ahura Mazda’s promise of everlasting victory and greatness to the Iranians, and the wings attached to this circle in the Frouhar image is the Symbol of this divine promise. The wings in three rows are the reminder of ‘good deeds, good words or speech and good thoughts’” (Khalaj Amir Hosseini, 2008, p. 15). “In Iranian mythology, circle, sphere, hemisphere, square and cube are the symbols which represent and describe the Ahura Mzada. An equilateral triangle is the symbol of harmony and proportion, the fertility of the earth, and sometimes connotatively refers to the Earth. If its head points upward, it symbolizes fire, male gender; and if the head of the triangle points downward, it symbolizes the water and the female gender. Thus, in the Persian mythology, triangle is the symbol of Anahita, the water Goddess” (Mohajer, 2000, p. 61). Moreover, “the sun

possesses many of the characteristics of the Mehr, the ancient God. It is the forgiving, victorious and the creator of life Mehr who has an innocent mother such as Anahita (Khalaj, 2008, p. 14).

The Plant Symbols

The growth of the thousand branches from the thousand seed tree, when the Simorgh (phoenix) takes off from the tree and starts flying, is the symbol of picking the fruits and the experiences producing result; and breaking of the branches when the Simorgh lands on the tree is the sign of its fruitfulness usefulness (Fasaie, 2004, p. 43). Lily is the representation of a human being who has ascended spiritually and become one with the God, a God, who has been thought of in the image of the symbolic sun and shares many features with lily (Hosseini, 2008, p. 18). Lily represents spiritual blossoming, because its roots are embedded in the mud, and despite this, it grows upward and toward the sky. It comes out of the dark waters and its flowers grow under the rays and light of the sun (Michele & Grub, 2000, p. 154). The first and the most important type of decoration in Grabar’s opinion is the plant designs and “palm leaves, half a palm leaf, vine leaves and clusters, and rose decoration are the dominant ornaments” (Grabar, 2000, p. 215)” On the other hand, “Lily, is the symbol of perfection and Distinctness, because its leaves, flowers and fruit are circular “(Wolf, 1993, p. 348).”

The Animal Symbols

Ancient Iranian religion, the sacred place for agriculture and animal breeding is allowed. Coma in different parts of the Avesta, the Zoroastrian holy book, and Middle Persian texts, many references to animals, is seen to describe and classify them. Lion, in different cases, is the most common Achaemenid designs “(Prada, 2004, p. 27). Moreover, the horse, ram and boar are the incarnation of the God Bahram (Mars) (ferrier, 2005, p. 153). Due to the presence of mountain goats in different parts of Iran, “its image is left on the relics, pottery and ceramic works of the ancient Iran and Mesopotamia in realistic, abstract, symbolic, and simple or winged.” (Prada, 2004, p. 25). Soroush manifests himself in the form of a rooster or a cock and the God Mehr appears in the form of a handsome Sheppard. In Gayomard’s story, he appears in the form of a leopard skin wearing fairy (Prosper, 2004, p. 47). In Balaami’s book and in the story of Gayomard’s rule, white cock and its victory over the snake is mentioned. He also writes, the Persians perceive the rooster and its timely croaking as lucky and believe that demons don’t enter a house in which there is a cock (Saba, 2005, p. 64). Lion, in the ancient civilizations, has



been used as the symbol of power, might, and ruling and was considered to be as powerful as the sun (Jobs, 2000, p. 76). “The horned animals, also, were considered the ruler of the skies, and in the astronomical constellation encyclopedia, they are the month of Day (January)” (Kiani, 2000, p. 76). “Two chickens, one on each side of a plant, is one off the distinctive images of the Sassanid Era which could be seen on a metal ewer. Moreover, an eagle with a side view of its head depicting a woman has been carved on, both, a Sassanid tray and a ceramic cup belonging to the Islamic Era (Zamani, 1996, p. 174).” Dog, also, has an important role in the divine world. He guards the souls of the righteous soul. He who thinks acts and talks according to the teachings of the Asha, his soul shall be protected by this animal. Dog protects the souls of the Zoroastrians from the time they pass away to the time they cross the Chinood Bridge (Jamasp, 1907) ". The processing of domestic animals in connection with their symbolism is significant in Nishapur pottery design.

The Human Symbols

“The hunters on a horseback, the accession of the rulers and dancers among the animals and the birds, are some of the images found on the pottery from Nishapur,






which similar images could be found on the metal relics and pottery of the Sassanid Era. An example of such designs is the images of the story of Bahram Gur and his musician, Azade, in metal works and textile which were popular during the Islamic Era (Zamani, 1976, p. 23). “Bowls with the image of the king on them (his hunting and ascension to the crown) which were made by mimicking the works from the past” (Ashpuler, 1990, p. 17). Perhaps the most frequently ordered dishes are ornaments with the images of the princes which are designed in a symbolic way. The authenticity of the mythic symbols human-like design of the tale of Bahram Gur is visualized by showing the power and glory of all the parties in the legislature, and then the hunt is designed. Simorgh, also, has a great importance in the Persian mythology. He is considered to be “wise, knowledgeable, a healer, knower of the future and all the secrets, protector of Zal and his offspring. Moreover, Simorgh plays the role of a father or mother for Zal. The fact that when Zal burns one of Simorgh’s feathers the mythical bird rushes to his aid, shows this (Joneidi, 2007, p. 114). Of course, in another place, Simorgh is compared with the Goddess of water, lady Anahita, and the bird is considered as possessing feminine features and characteristics (Taghi, 2011, p. 356).

Table 1. The Symbols and Myths of the Ancient Myths and Symbols on the Household Utensils of Nishapur during the Early Islamic Era


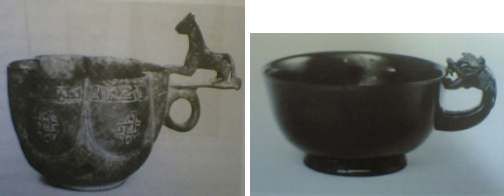


Samples	Manifestations	Indicators	
	<p>Sun Mittra</p>	<p>Circle</p>	<p>Geometric Symbols</p>








Design Identity of the Household Items

	<p>Ahura Mazda</p>	<p>Square</p>	
	<p>Fire, Mountain Anahita</p>	<p>Triangle</p>	
	<p>Good Deeds, Good Words or Speech, Good Thoughts</p>	<p>Trinity of the deeds</p>	
	<p>Water and Agricultural lands</p>	<p>Hatching and Diagonal Lines</p>	
	<p>The Tree of Life and Thousand Seed Tree</p>	<p>Tree</p>	<p>Plant Symbols</p>



	<p>The World and the Passing of Time</p>	<p>Leaf and half leaf and Arabesque</p>	
	<p>Power, Sun</p>	<p>Lion</p>	<p>Animal symbols</p>
	<p>Bahram the God</p>	<p>Horse</p>	
	<p>Soroush</p>	<p>Rooster</p>	



	<p>Sassanid Design</p>	<p>Two Animals Facing One Another or Their Backs Turned to Each Other</p>	
	<p>Spiritual accompaniment</p>	<p>Dog</p>	
	<p>Water and Anahita</p>	<p>Mountain Goat</p>	
	<p>Soroush</p>	<p>Leopard</p>	
	<p>Water</p>	<p>Fish</p>	



	<p>Water, rain, cloud, snow</p>	<p>Anahita</p>	<p>Human symbols</p>
	<p>Sassanid Design</p>	<p>Rulers and Mythic Motifs</p>	
	<p>Sassanid Design</p>	<p>Hunter</p>	

CONCLUSION

Overall, it could be said that the Iranians kept their ancient culture, but they also embraced Islam and it became something more than a religion to them. They added many things to it that did not originate from the ancient times “(Frye, 1984, p. 163). Iranians not only became part of the Islamic world, they also lead it for long periods of time and made it a universal culture and religion. they are the ones who use the metaphor of Cedar for Islam, which bends when facing a severe wind, but stands tall again after the wind is gone (Frye, 1984, p. 163). Some ancient symbols and myths were changed with the arrival of Islam. The symbolic aspect in the design of the container shapes and decorations from the perspective of geography and urban identity in Nishapur is also important. Some symbols used are the same before and after Islam. For example, symbolizing the light to

represent wisdom and the symbols which are related to water, its sanctity in Islam as well as in Zoroastrianism, and the continuity and multiplicity of such symbols is in the early centuries of Islam clearly demonstrates this. Anahita is another one of those symbols, could be seen on the artifacts of the early Islamic Era.

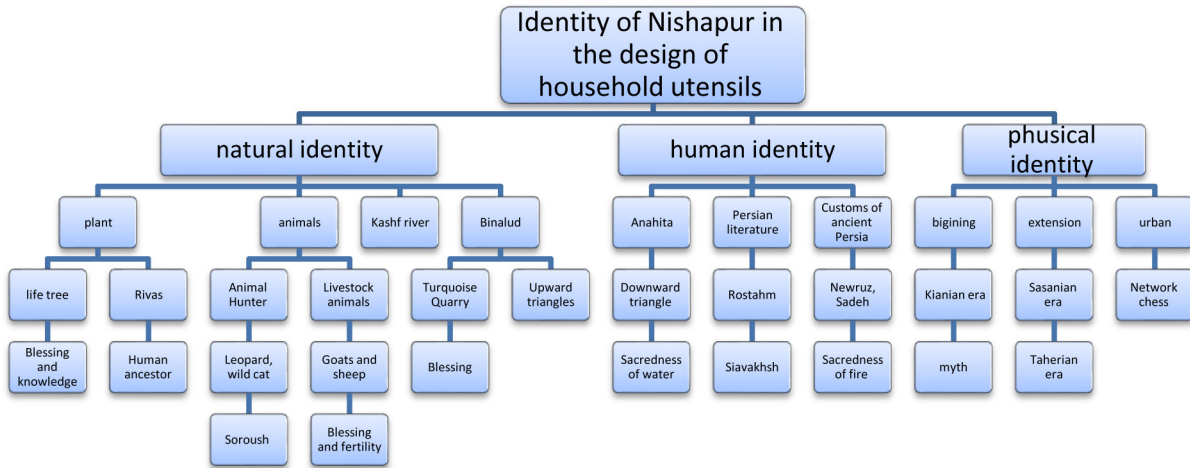


Fig. 1. The Ancient Symbols and the Myths in the Design of the Household Utensils of Nishapur from the 1st to the 5th Century (AH) of the Islamic Era

Since Nishapur was located on the path of the Silk Road and was considered the cultural junction point of the East, Iran and Islam, much symbolism could be seen in the design of the dishes in these centuries. This symbolism has originated from the religion and the ancient traditions and beliefs. Ultimately, one could summarize the reasons behind the influence of the ancient symbols and myths in design of the ceramic household utensils as follows:

Geometric Symbols: Circle, due to pointing to light and the mystical concepts, is considered to have been left from the ancient symbols and myths and has been used in the design and decoration of the dishes. Also, out of circles, polygons are made which are used in the Islamic designs. Hatching and diagonal lines have been used to represent the water and the agricultural lands. They are, especially used in the designs on the pitchers in which liquids such as water is stored.

Plant Symbols: Trees and lilies are couple of the symbols which have had significance in, both, the pre and post Islamic Eras. In some cases, tree has been depicted on the objects with some kind of animal, especially bird, on each side to represent the tree of life. The type of the tree is usually is vine, fig, olive and palm, because they are indigenous to Iran. Abundance of Arabesque, which in fact are the turns and the twists of the leafs and branches, it could be considered both as the plant and geometric symbols.

Animal Symbols: Mountain goats, both, because of its association with water and the fact that it is an animal native to Iran, are the symbols and myths of the ancient Iran and could be seen in the designs of the early Islamic

Era' household utensils. Cock, by integrating the beliefs about soroush and the sound of azan, is also considered. In general, birds are used in the designs more than the other animals. This could be due to their ability to fly and association of flying with the spirituality. However, symbols such as lion, cow, and eagle have been used less, because they are associated with earth and power. On the other hand, dog, due to its association with the divine world or the afterlife, has always had significance. Even, in some designs, the head of the Simorgh is replaced with the head of a dog

Human symbols: Human symbols are not seen in the household utensils during the early centuries of the Islamic Era. However, Simorgh or Anahita in combination with spiritual concepts are present in the designs. Some of the designs are human or imitations of the past works, such as the scene of the kings' ascension or their hunting. In some other cases, the designs have the facial images of the mythical deities such as that of Anahita.



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