



## Tenors and Concepts of Herbaceous Figures in the Throne of Jamshid

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### Abstract

Petroglyphs are an important feature of the Throne of Jamshid. The architecture is filled with numerous themes, concepts, and fundamental values from Iranian culture; and in this regard, the importance of herbaceous motifs is unique. Particularly, these motifs can be seen in various parts of the structure like stairways, Halls and ... either used separately, or in merger with other animal or human motifs. Amongst the herbaceous figures, cypress, and amongst flowers, lotus and rosette are seen in the figures of Persepolis. Extensive presence of these figures is related to the ancient belief of sanctification of herbs and deep respect of Iranians for nature. Symbols, thematic structures, and metaphors related to herbs are a vast part of ancient Persian myths. This article discusses the connection between the herbaceous figures of the Throne of Jamshid and the ancient Persian myths; it also discusses the hidden concepts and tenors. The results have shown that the herbaceous figures of Persepolis are related to the religious and mythical concepts of Iranian culture; and the Persian artist illustrates his percipient of the truth, universe, creation, and natural forces with the exploitation of allusions and symbols; therefore, by exploiting these concepts and symbols, the artist could make the unknown, something palpable in the eyes of the viewers.

**Keywords:** Throne of Jamshid; Relief; Herbaceous figures; Myth; Symbol.

### 1. Introduction

The Throne of Jamshid reflexes the finest manifestation of Persian art, and it is a symbol of national Iranian art and culture. We can assert that the Achaemenid art –in respect to theme, purpose, figure, and painting- has manifested itself in the Throne of Jamshid or Persepolis. This colossal structure manifests the power and high-rank of Achaemenian dynasty; it also insists on the divine and heavenly place of Achaemenian rulers. In other words, Persepolis is the earthly manifestation of the celestial city of Minoo.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, all the motifs and symbols of this structure urge on its benedictory essence.

The history of mankind shows that all beliefs and religions had exploited symbolism; in this way, the man could elucidate the concepts which could not be shown through other mediums. Like others, Persians, too, reflected their religious views, which were derived from the religious instructions of Zoroaster. For example, “virtue was represented or symbolized by buffalo, discipline and order by fire, and immortality with herbs” (Afzal-toosi&Hassanpour, 2012, p.143).

If we look at Iranian’s mythological beliefs, we can observe numerous herbaceous elements’ instances which serve as symbolic means. These instances include a great deal of meanings, in respect of content and form. Base on Persian mythology, humans are considered as herbs origin; we can trace this belief in the story of ‘Kiumars,’ and growth of a rhubarb from his seed.

Widespread usage of plants in Iranian art emanate from this fact that plants can carry so many implicit meanings and tenors. As we observe the reliefs of the Throne of Jamshid, we understand that some plants were more important than the others. This structure is the very first instance of the exploitation of herb-drawing used for decoration. Instances of herbaceous figures used in Persepolis are cedar, lotus, and rosette. Base on the vast exploitations of reliefs in Persepolis, the current article discusses the thoughts and factors which resulted in the huge usage of these figures.

<sup>1</sup>Minoo means heaven in Persian

## 1.1 Goal of the Research

The goal of the current research is to find the hidden meanings and tenors in symbols and herbaceous figures on the reliefs of the Throne of Jamshid.

## 1.2 Method of the Research

The method of the analysis for this article is descriptive-analytic, and it is based on library research.

## 1.3 Importance of the Research

The herbaceous figures used in Persepolis carry values and signs which is based on Persians mythological beliefs. It is obvious that by knowing these figures, one can acquire vast knowledge about cultural values, beliefs, and the society of that particular period.

## 1.4 Research Question

- 1- What is the correlation between ancient Iranian myths and the herbaceous figures of the Throne of Jamshid?
- 2- What is the motivation for the exploitation of herbaceous symbols in the reliefs of the Throne of Jamshid?

## 1.5 Research Hypothesis

- 1- There is a fundamental correlation, in terms of beliefs, between the herbaceous figures of the Throne of Jamshid and the ancient myths of Iran.
- 2- It seems that the respect and purity of herbs –and their relation with Persian religious and mythological beliefs- are the most important factor for their exploitations in the reliefs of Persepolis.

## 2. A Brief Look at Achaemenid Art and Civilization

When Cyrus the great defeated his own grandfather, Astyages, the reign of Medes came to an end. “In addition to Medes and its allegiance’s lands, Cyrus became the ruler of Lydia and a vast part of the Anatolian peninsula” (Hazhberi, 2010, p.80). In this way, the Achaemenid Empire established by Cyrus in 550 years before Christ. The Empire has extended during the reign of Darius I (522 – 484 B.C.); “it’s extent was from the Indus valley in the Indian subcontinent to north of Greece and Egypt” (Azhand, 2011, p.34). Due to its great directorship, all the tribes, that were under the reign of Achaemenid empire, had abundance of security and welfare. “Achaemenian kings’ policies were based on respecting the religious rites, culture, and art of each zone. This results in the progress of art and civilization; and spread out the Iranian culture” (Ehsani, 2011, p.55). Achaemenians, who were the inheritors of the culture of earlier Iranian tribes, tried to use the structures and methods of the earlier nations like Babelians and Medes. In fact, the Achaemenian art is a mixture of the artistic experiments between Persian tribes and the above mentioned tribes. It can be stated that a kind of official art was shaped under the support of Achaemenian kings which had a propagandistic essence, and it was used as a tool to show the monarchy’s power.

## 3. The Throne of Jamshid (Persepolis)

The Throne of Jamshid was built between 520 to 460 B.C. under the reigns of Darius and Xerxes. The buildings are located in the town of Marvdasht (45 kilometers from the city of Shiraz), on the foot of the mountain Rahmat. The Throne of Jamshid is located on a high hill, and one can access to its halls through huge steps which are placed on the western side. Many buildings are included in Persepolis: “entrance stairs, gate of nations, the Hall of hundred pillars, the entrance of central palace, Heaven of Darius, Hadish palace of Xerxes, council’s hall, King’s treasury, and other buildings” (Pirnia, 2013, p.77) In fact, Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of Achaemenians and a center for the rites of coronation and Nowrouz celebration. Representatives from other nations attended in these celebrations and gave their gifts to the kings. We can assert that the Achaemenian style of architecture and sculpturing is manifested in Persepolis; this style exhibits the political power and grandeur of the Achaemenian empire. As Arthur Pope asserts: “the Throne of Jamshid was the symbol of power, grandeur and military unity; it was aware of its prophetic mission of religion and morality” (Pope, 1991, p.30)

## 4. The reliefs of Persepolis

In the Throne of Jamshid, reliefs are always considered as a part of the building. The synthesis of architecture and relief becomes at its finest in the Throne of Jamshid. The reliefs of Persepolis are in complete balance and harmony with the architecture of the building, and they are designed in a way that can be seen by the pedestrians. As Jensen notes: “reliefs of Persepolis usually illustrate the scenes which had happened at that place, like the arrayal of troops, watching of the guards, the souvenirs which were given to the kings, the vessels which were carried by laborers, entering and exiting of kings into the palace with their entourages (Jensen, 1981, p.61) these reliefs are installed in a way that arouse the

impression of something holy in the eyes of the viewer. The designs in Persepolis are divided into three categories in general, which are humanistic, animalistic and herbaceous. This article focuses on herbaceous figures.

## 5. Herbaceous Figures

Herbaceous figures in the Throne of Jamshid are Cypress, Lotus and Rosette. In Achaemenian art, these figures have a vast application as they have been applied to different parts of the structure in numerous ways. For example, in each space, a branch of a tree or a flower can be seen in hand of each king or his entourage. A flower can be interpreted as a symbol for kindness, friendship and peace. In fact, the Throne of Jamshid is a stony garden for beautiful stony flowers.

### 5.1 Cypress

The Persian belief in Ahouramazda, the supreme god, and his herbaceous symbol, cypress was the motivation for the appearance of these kind of reliefs in the Throne of Jamshid. In the queue of soldiers and guests, each group is divided by a cypress tree (figure 1). In addition, in Apadana's staircase, the battle of lion and cow can be observed which is surrounded by the cypress trees in each sides.

### 5.2 Lotus

In Achaemenian era, there had been a vast attention to lotus as a motif. This flower can be seen in the hands of kings, princes, etc. in the figures of Persepolis; as Isa Behnam puts it: "in the Throne of Jamshid, the Persian aristocrats had a lotus flower each in their hands as a symbol of peace and friendship. This flower is a symbol for royal family that advocates peace and benevolence (Behnam, 1972, p.25). In imperial ritual of Achaemenian dynasty, kings had a lotus flowers in their hands during the time of accession. Also, when Pars and Mede's tribes came to kings' presence carried such flowers in their hands. In the threshold of the main hall of Xerxes' building, there is a relief of the king and his servants. The king has a ruling cane in his right hand and a lotus flower in his left, as he proceeds into the hall.

The relief of the treasury shows that Darius I is sitting on the throne, with a cane in his right hand and a lotus in his left. The crown prince has the same flower in his hand. In front of the king, there are two censers, which their caps are designed with lotus flowers (Kiani, 1995, p.18). (Figure 2)



Figure 2- The relief of the treasury



Figure 1- Representatives of various nations

In the staircase of Apadana's palace, the battle between cow and lion can be seen; and a row of lotus flowers is situated at the end of the staircase. (this fight is originated from cosmic phenome of the battle between the seasons, and lion is a symbol for the sun, and cow is a symbol for the rain.) (Figure 3)

Pillars are the most important part of Achaemenian's architecture, which is constituted from the three parts of base, stem and head. The bases are usually cubic or bell-like which are decorated with lotus' buds. (Figure 4)



Figure 4- Bases decorated with lotus flowers



Figure 3- Apadana's eastern staircase

### 5.3 Rosette

Rosette flower is amongst the most exploited motifs in the Throne of Jamshid. Some calls it a sunflower and some knows it as chamomile. “this relief is used to fill the spaces and margins in the main reliefs” (Mosavi, 2011, p.250). This motif can be seen in most of Persepolis’ decorations such as staircases, guests, rows of soldiers and on the bricks. (Figure 5)

One of the unique instance of these reliefs is the threshold of Apadana’s Hall which thick-set quadrilateral stones are decorated Rosette’s smooth reliefs. (Figure 6)



**Figure 6- A black and shiny stone of the threshold**



**Figure 5- Margins decorated with Rosette Motifs**

## 6. Concepts of Herbaceous Symbols

Human life’s dependence on the herbs, resulted in the pervasiveness of plants in human life. A great deal of this presence can be seen in the folktales or the ecocritic observations of the world. From the old times, herbs had a spiritual essence in human beliefs, as they formed different rites and cultures of various tribes. In beliefs of the ancient era, a plant acted as a symbol for a concept which was metaphysical and holy. For instance, tree is a symbol of root and fundament of human conception of the world; “it also is a pillar which binds the earth and the sky; and in its most original picture, tree is considered to know all the secrets of creation” (Boboukor, 1997, p.9).

A mythological way of thinking, which is based on the trilogy structure of the universe is illustrated through a motif of a tree. A tree, which consists of three parts has a part in the ground (Hell), a part in the world (world), and one part in the air (Heaven). “The Zoroaster’s mythology was divided to these three parts: heavenly world or the world of light (Hourmazd), underground world or hell (Ahriman), and a void space between these two which is called ‘Tohigi’” (Bahar, 1998, p.39). “Tree is famous for its immortality because of its process of evolution from a tiny seed to a great stem, and its constant cycling in the circle of life” (Cook, 2006, p.9). “This cycle of life and death of tree is an insignia for death, resurrection and life which are the fundamental doctrines in religions and holy books” (Malreb, 2006, P.367). In the words of MirchaEliadeh, “tree is a symbol of immortality; and because life without death is the sole truth, tree also becomes a symbol of truth” (Eliadeh, 1997, p.261). The herbaceous symbols have different backgrounds in Persian art which will be discussed in this article.

### 6.1 Cypress Tree

Cypress Tree has a very special place in Persian culture, and it is favored by Iranians for thousand years. In Persian culture, Cypress tree is related to a rite which cherishes the sun; this is because of the fact that cypress is always green, as it is stable and immune against the coldness and darkness. In this regard, Cypree became a symbol of the shining sun and Immortality. In Persian mythology, Zoroaster got two branches of cypress from Ahouramazda and brought them to earth from heaven. Also, it has been believed that Bahman Emshaspand saw a man who was a messenger of Hourmazd; in that encounter, Bahman had a white branch in his hand which is believed to be a cypress branch (Amouzegar&Tafazoli, 1993, p.84). in Persian culture, cypress is defined as honest, tall, lofty, young, firm and free. “cypress relation with freedom can be related to ‘Nahid,’ which has a mythological background as being the emblem of freedom” (Yahaghi, 2012, p.461).

### 6.2 Lotus

In Persian mythology, lotus flower is connected to two important natural elements, which are sun and water. Since lotus flower opens with the sunrise, and closes with the sunset, it has been known as the manifestation of the sun or ‘Mitra.’ And since it is in the water, it has been related to ‘Anahita,’ the lady of all waters in universe.

Lotus flower is an important symbol in the rites of ‘Mehr.’ Hashem Razi assets that “entering the rites of Mehr was difficult and it had seven stages. Each person who passed three stages, awarded a lotus flower to be tattooed on his body, and in this way, he entered to the ring of righteous people. Also, in some altars, reliefs of lotus flowers could be observed” (Razi, 1991, p.332). “lotus was an emblem of both power and fortune” (Soodavar, 2005, p.63). “lotus is the manifestation of the unity between God and human, because the image of God in ancient times were analogous to lotus

flower” (Amirhosseini, 2007, p.18). “lotus resembles a spiritual blossom as its roots are in the mud, and it strives upward and moves in the direction of sun and light” (Grub and Mitchell, 2001, p.154). Also, “lotus is an epitome of beauty, because it has round fruits and petals” (Woolf, 1994, p.348).

### 6.3 Rosette

Rosette is the ancient emblem of the sun and the force of life. It is like a wheel, and this roundness is probably attributed to the sun. “This flower had been called the god of middle east” (Hall, 2002, p.302).

## 7. Conclusion

The herbaceous figures in Persepolis are the manifestation of the Persian people’s beliefs which are full of symbols and emblems related to their rites. These figures are connected with Persians’ mythological and religious backgrounds as they reflect people’s thoughts on the universe, creation and nature, as it can be viewed that the art of that particular period is connected with nature and holy essences. The Persian artist, who exploited covert and allegorical languages to define his cause, used symbols to exude his perception of the universe; in this regard, the artist could capture the elusive meanings and manifest them in figurative way.

Since Cypress, Rosette, and Lotus have a lots of exclusive meanings in Persian mythology and culture, they have a special place in Achaemenian art. This can be easily seen in figurines and reliefs of the Throne of Jamshid.

The results of this research can be summarized as follows:

- The structure of the Throne of Jamshid is being considered as a center of religion, which keeps the fundamental values of a nation who illustrated their beliefs through the metaphoric medium of motifs and reliefs.
- The respect for herbs and plants resulted in the exploitation of herbaceous figures in artistic works, especially in the reliefs of the Throne of Jamshid.
- Persian artist’s meticulousness about the surrounding nature, and his longing for entering the depth and meaning of existence, are manifested in some herbaceous figures such as cypress, lotus and rosette.
- The herbaceous figures of the Throne of Jamshid have aesthetic values in respect to form, in addition to their religious and traditional backgrounds.
- The Achaemenian artist foregrounds the best aspects of the herbaceous figures to their thoughts and senses.
- The herbaceous figures of the Throne of Jamshid are paralleled with Zoroaster religion and Mitra’s rites.

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