

Investigating the Role of Boar in Iranian & Chinese Art

Animal symbols have ever enjoyed a special position in the artistic compositions, sometimes held as the symbols of gods and worshiped in various rituals accordingly. Such importance might have been due to animals' role in providing for the livelihood of the peasantry lives.

A symbol finds its meaning within the backdrop of the culture with which it is associated. Therefore, a symbol is a context-based concept, the interpretation of which could be altered depending on the circumstances. One of the best ways to grasp the meaning of symbols is investigating the mind frames and belief systems of the ancient communities where such symbols were used.

The interactions of the cultures and civilizations have always led to the swap of symbols from one civilization to the other over time because there is always some sort of inexorable cultural exchange involved in such associations. The existence of shared textual signs and symbols among disparate civilizations testifies to this very fact. However, such impressions obtain a new form as the societies' habitation place and requirements alter in order to fit to the new situation.

On this foundation, the study ahead aims to investigate the symbol of boar within the Iranian and Chinese civilizations covering the span of time since the formation of the Silk Road, coinciding with the Parthian period in Iran and the reign of Han dynasty in China, towards the fall of the Sassanid and Tang dynasties. Noteworthy is that when examining the Sino-Iranian relations, the role of Silk Road

in the establishment of the relations of these two ancient powers stands out. During thousands of years of historic contacts between Iran and China through the Silk Road, the two countries have also enjoyed extensive cultural exchanges particularly during the Parthian's era that concurred with the sway of the Han dynasty in China. During this era, commercial transactions between the two countries flourished wherein the Silk Road played an irrefutable part.

The use of Boar symbol in Persian art dates back to antiquity. This symbol is frequent in Iranian art but it occasionally appears in some Chinese art works as well.

In the Iranian culture, Boar is one of the expressions of 'Bahram', the god of war, who is mostly accompanied by the goddess 'Mitra' in hunting scenes. Hunting is one of the fundamental signs of demonstrating human authority and dominion over the supernatural forces that have been depicted not only in the illustrative documents but also the religious texts such as Bahram Yašt. In this respect, the boar, 's head within a pearl roundel is one of the most prominent common Boar motifs in Iranian and Chinese art.

On this basis, this research tends to answer this question that has the boar motif been transferred from Iran to China due to the cultural exchanges that occurred upon the establishment of the Silk Road? The foundation of the study is laid upon this hypothesis that "it seems that the formation of the boar motif in the artworks of the Chinese civilization is derived from Iranian art".

Conducted through a comparative-analytic approach, the study aims to elucidate on the role of boar in the artworks of the aforesaid eras and recount their similarities, differences and representations in Iranian and Chinese art.

Nasrin Dastan

(Corresponding Author)

Ph. D, Chinese Art History
Assistant Professor, Institute
of Arts Studies & Research
Email: artdastan@gmail.com

Noushin Kazami

M.A. Art Research,
Alzahra University
Email:

kazemi.noshin@gmail.com



The results acquired confirm that due to Iranian influences, this motif became widely popular in ancient China; however, the Chinese artists used it within the principles of their own art traditions. Consequently, this motif has been generally applied to the artworks related to the world of the dead and afterlife such as tomb decorations; in other words, in Funerary arts.

The outcomes also approve that the Boar motif has tread an evolutionary path in Iran but its development in China begins with the formation of the Silk Road; when China made its first contacts with Iran. On the other hand, the paper concludes that the spiral, pearl roundels around the Boar head in Chinese textiles are Sassanid motifs transmitted from Iran to China. Called 'medallion', this motif evolved along with the Chinese art and emerged in their art forms later on.

Key Words: Iran, Boar motif, Iranian Culture, China, Silk Road

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