

The Symbolic Concepts of Water and Trees in Ancient Persian Arts and its Appearance on the Altars of the Islamic Period with an Emphasis on the Theory of Evolutionism

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Introduction

The altar is a symbol of a holy place. The tradition of decorating altars, which is repeated as a stylistic form in the Islamic period, is related to the religious philosophical concept that emphasizes the concept of this holy place. Based on symbolism, the center is the supreme example of holiness and pure reality as all other symbols of pure reality (such as the tree of life, the fountain of youth, and so on.) are also located in the center. In this research, the concept of the decorative motifs of trees and vases in the altar is analyzed considering the sacredness of this place. The present analysis seeks to answer this question: what is the relationship between the symbols of water and plants represented in the altars of the Islamic period and their earlier visual patterns in the pre-Islamic art in Iran.

Research Method

This study is descriptive-analytical in terms of methodology. The data collection method is based on library review, and data analysis was done qualitatively. The principle of evolutionism is based on the fact that every cultural phenomenon should be considered the result of a long chain of changes along a time-space line.

Research Findings

The intellectual principles of evolutionary theory are based on a belief in an evolutionary line, a beginning, an end, and milestones that can be called moments of leap or fundamental change. In this approach, the shapes and their changes in the works were taken into consideration; it depicted how an art form spread on a territory or a historical aspect. This principle is noteworthy that some components of a certain culture and practices or customs may remain in the same culture for a long time after the transformation of other components. According to Taylor, two important laws about religion and culture exist. The first principle is the unity or the psychological sameness among human beings. The second principle is the pattern of human evolution or intellectual progress over time. The cultural and intellectual evolution of human and the basic homomorphism of the human mind are related to each other. The principles of evolutionism can be analyzed for the symbols of water and trees in Islamic altars. Persian myths have described the two symbolic elements of water

and trees in the holy places and considered them to represent the center of the universe and the origin of life, respectively. In the verses of the Holy Quran, these symbolic trees are mentioned and described. The descriptions of the Tubi Tree, the Sidra al-Muntahi Tree, the olive tree along with the description of the paradises with flowing rivers show the place of these symbols in the holy book of the Quran. In these verses, the connection of faith, piety, and goodness with the symbols of water and the eternal tree is evident. In fact, these descriptions of the heavenly book in the form of an allegory, derived from the archetypes, are about the sacred tree and correspond to the evolutionary process of this symbol. The evolution of elements from the ancient texts (the pre-Islamic religious texts), i.e., the symbols of the tree and the water of life, can be seen in the text of the Qur'an, as the most recent religious text. They have found an evolutionary and allegorical form and are continuous with the element of goodness and salvation. In this evolutionary process, a change in the meaning of symbols of the tree of life and the water of life can be seen: that is, a change from eternal life and immortality in the material world to immortality in connection with faith in the metaphysical world. In fact, the symbols have become sublime.

Conclusion

On the basis of intertextuality, there is no text without a pre-text, and on the basis of the theory of evolution, it can be emphasized that in the field of sacred water and plants, the oldest art forms have been established and continued from the past. These components of Iranian culture have been continued in their original form or along with evolutionary changes in the arts of the Islamic period, especially in altars. The tree of life appears with a tree and plant motif, and the water of life is represented by the symbol of a jar or cup. Based on these documents and the first principle of evolutionism, a mental and religious pattern related to the sanctity of natural elements can be identified in the minds of Iranian people. With the religious transition that happened in Iran after Islam and the domination of monotheism and monotheism, the idea of praising one God and the mystical view of the world, as the signs of the Lord, created the ground for the use of natural symbols of water and trees in altars. This common feature of respect for nature in pre-Islamic Iran, which bore many similarities with ancient civilizations, is a form of human psychological unity in accordance with the first principle of evolutionism. In Iranian altars, the sacred tree is located in the center of the altar, and sometimes it is wrapped in the form of an abstract plant motif on the pillars of the altar. The pot or jar is also at the bottom of the tree or column or on top of it. While the divine verses, which are the sources of blessing and life-giving, are revealed on it. In fact, the jar is the medium of receiving grace from heaven. The evolved forms of plant elements have evolved. Arabesques and khatais replaced the leafy trees of the Sassanid period with systematic rotations, and the jars, at the top and bottom of the columns were sometimes decorated with plant motifs. And this course of semantic and formal evolution in the design of water and tree symbols in the altar is in accordance with the second principle of evolutionism, which means progress and evolution over time. Continuity of prayer at the altar and communication with the Almighty God, accompanied by the symbols of the tree and the jar, is reminiscent of heavenly descriptions of believers' connection with the heavenly trees, flowing streams, and the cups filled with pure wine from the heavenly streams.

Keywords: symbol, water, tree, altar, Iran, Islamic period, evolutionism.