

# **A Comparative Study of the Structure of Pre-Islamic Iranian Textual Symbols and the Incantation Symbols of the Islamic Period**

## **Abstract**

Ancient written material consists of symbols and signs that have evolved from pictorial cyphers to alphabetic letters. Calligraphy in Iran is an imperative symbol of civilization since ancient times and a number of these written signs have continued in the Islamic period. The main issue of the research is how ancient Iranian textual signs survive on the hexes of the Islamic period as part of traditional Iranian graphics. The research method is descriptive and analytical and data is collected via library contents through identification and image reading. The research findings indicate that a number of the “good” symbols that appear in Iranian hexes are formally rooted in the oldest meaningful texts including Poroto Elamite and Linear Elamite. The visual structure of a number of ancient Elamite linear signs (Poroto Elamite and Linear Elamite) can be identified on the incantations of the Islamic period. In some cases, the new enchantment signs, in combination with other motifs and geometric signs, have a distinct appearance and behold a detailed affiliation with the old textual signs. These symbols are the shapes of uneven forms, squares, circles, triangles, crosses and zigzag lines and the plant symbol that are associated with the influential elements of life. The combination of image and text in the incantations are based on a meaningful aesthetic system. Geometric symbols derived from ancient written texts are shaped structures that have formed the basis of the writing of some spells. This feature can be considered as one of the principles of the overall page layout of the enchantments of the Islamic period.

## **Research aims:**

1. Identifying the similarities and differences in the structure of ancient Elamite linear signs with the symbols of Islamic incantations.
2. Interpreting the symbolic meaning of common signs of pre-Islamic texts and spell patterns of the Islamic period.

## **Research questions:**

1. What are the similarities and differences between the visual structure of the ancient Iranian textual symbols and the symbolic motifs of the enchantments of the Islamic period?
2. What are the symbolic meanings of similar signs in the ancient texts and incantations of the Islamic period?

**Keywords:** visual structure, textual signs, pre-Islamic Iran, incantations of the Islamic period.

## **Introduction**

Due to their nature, amulets and charms are part of the arts of the Islamic period, which have beautifully displayed the accompaniment of visual symbols and written symbols in decorated page layouts. These works can be considered as one of the grounds for the emergence of popular beliefs in Iranian culture. In popular culture, spells and amulets have long been thought to have magical powers, and people believed that installing and hanging them on property and places and carrying them by humans or animals would ward off evil, disease, the invasion of creatures and undeniably evil forces; such items were decorated with symbols. Symbols mediate communication as well as human mental interpretation of the natural world. Works of art, especially talismans of the Islamic period, are the basis for the formation of symbolic signs. The symbol has something more than its obvious and unmediated meaning, which includes the broad aspect of the subconscious and can never be precisely defined or fully explained. With a little reflection it can be seen that symbolism creates a theological, interpretive, philosophical school according to which works of art will have no apparent and objective meaning, but will only be a symbolic and mental expression of thought, hence the elements of the amulet; furthermore, it is associated with symbols that have a meaning beyond the apparent concept. In this study, the symbols of the good are the symbols of fertility. There are codes and signs that are semantically related to the categories of life, growth and productiveness. The symbols of fertility are closely related to the elements of nature and it can be generally stated that the motifs related to the concept of fertility are abstract representations of the natural elements of water, earth, plants, useful animals and also represent the two complementary forces of female and male. The visual structure of these symbols is comparable to some pre-Islamic linear symbols that have been considered in this research.

Regarding the background of the present study, it should be said that no independent work with this title has been done so far, but a number of researches have discussed enchantments. In the field of amulets, we can refer to Tanavoli's research (2008) in the book of Traditional Iranian Spells and Chants, which has collected, introduced and expressed the secrets of charms in the Islamic period. Asgarzadeh (2004) in his article on eye ulcers and methods of its prevention and treatment in Khaghani Divan, has studied the popular beliefs related to the evil eye in Khaghani's poems. Shahrabaki (2014) has studied the spell and amulet and its effect on the motifs of Sistan and Baluchestan carpets. According to the studied backgrounds, none of the previous studies have examined the symbols of goodness on the spells and have not compared the structure of the linear signs of pre-Islamic Iran with the symbols of the incantation. The present study efforts to compare the symbols engraved on the spells of the Islamic period with the oldest lines of Iranian thinkers in Ilam in terms of visual structure. The semantics of symbolic elements and the structural analysis of spells have been considered in this research. The research method is descriptive and analytical and the method of collecting library contents is through videotaping and image reading.

## **Conclusion**

Pre-Islamic calligraphy in Iran contains a collection of cryptic calligraphic symbols engraved on tablets under a structured system of calligraphy and language. The evolution of calligraphy from illustrator to alphabet in pre-Islamic Iran created the ground for forgetting such signs as calligraphy. These linear signs have appeared in the form of symbolic and disjointed geometric patterns on works of Islamic art, especially the spells of the Islamic period. Therefore, due to the passage of time and the distance of millennia from the meaning of linear signs, emerging or evolved forms of pre-Islamic linear signs were considered as a role in the spells of the Islamic period. On the other hand, the spell and its place in popular culture is obvious. Spells with the concepts of good protect man and his possessions against the forces of evil. Thus,

the motifs of amulets are associated with symbolic meanings. In fact, the belief in the existence of supernatural forces in objects is part of Iranian folk culture, which has led to the creation of spells and amulets in various forms. Hence, charms and amulets are part of Islamic art, and distinct examples of them can be found in metal works, weaves, written works, clothes and fabrics. These works have two components of form and content. The visual features of the spells and the systematic arrangement of the text and image show the graphic features of these works, which is a testament to the knowledge of traditional Iranian-Islamic layout. The religious beliefs of Iranians in the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods show that the forces of good and Ahura are the protectors of creatures against the forces of evil. This matter is well mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and its reflection can be seen in Surah An-Nas and the phrase "Awz B Allah Min al-Shaitan al-Rajim". Thus, the spells of the Islamic period are adorned with symbols that evoke elements of goodness. Symbols associated with the components of abundance, blessing and fertility including geometric symbols such as wine triangle, rhombus, square, cross, bush, butterfly or bow tie, zigzag lines and plant. These symbols are comparable to the oldest linear symbols in Ilam and similar examples can be found on pre-Elamite and Elamite lines. The visual structure of many geometric symbolic motifs formed on the spells of the Islamic period is comparable to the symbolic symbols of the pre-Elamite and Elamite scripts. Many spell patterns are exactly the same as the linear symbols, and in some cases the spell patterns are evolved shapes and a combination of linear symbols. In some spells, pre-Islamic linear symbols form the basis of the spell text page layout, or a spell represents the accompaniment of some ancient linear symbols. In some cases, the structure of a linear sign, such as a rhombus triangle with wine, is accompanied by additions to a spell. Written signs such as the Five Qols and the five Surahs of the Holy Qur'an, which express refuge in God from evil, and together with the seeds of Esfand, the blue spheres of the evil eye, and the colored circles forming the vines. Symbolists consider the symbol of an edged triangle as a symbol of rain and abundance of produce, a rhombus and a square as a symbol of the earth, a cross as a symbol of the rotation of days and the number four as sacred, a bush as a symbol of land, a butterfly as a symbol of God, zigzag lines as a symbol of water and plants. Hence, they recognize the power of growth and life. All of these symbols are comparable to pre-Islamic linear symbols in Iran. Signs that can be seen in the pre-Elamite and Elamite lines around the fourth and third millennium BC. Therefore, the geometric symbolic motifs of the spells of the Islamic period are rooted in ancient Iranian lines in terms of form and are related in content to the blessing and fruitful elements in material life, which can be named as symbols of fertility and goodness. Animal symbols are also seen on the spells of the Islamic period. The horse is used as a symbol of humidity and purity for spells of speed and haste. Fish is a symbol of fertility and chicken is a heavenly symbol that promises life. Lions and cows are also mythological elements related to the category of life. Thus, the spells of the Islamic period contain symbolic motifs related to the concept of life and blessing, some of which are rooted in pre-Islamic lines and calligraphy.

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