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## **The Study of Meanings of Motifs on Artifacts Discovered from Archeological Sites of Gilan Province and their Classification based on Dumézil's Trifunctional Model**

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### **Abstract**

Gilan is one of the historical centers which has drawn the attention of archeological and art researchers due to the fact that unique artistic works have been discovered from its archeological sites. The present study seeks to review the meanings of motifs on archeological artifacts discovered from Gilan and to classify the artifacts based on Dumézil's trifunctional model. This study aims to increase awareness of form and content of designs on historical works of Gilan and to detail historical background of Gilan. To do this, motifs are classified and symbolic meanings of motifs of artifacts discovered from Gilan are consequently detailed. Finally, the three functions of the sacral, the martial and the economic which constitute Dumézil's trifunctional model for social and cultural structure of Indo-European tribes are used to study the artifacts discovered from Gilan. In general, motifs on archeological artifacts of Gilan could be divided into four groups of plant, animal, human, and abstract which could be analyzed through Dumézil's trifunctional model. Mixed animal motifs are related to first function and show a sacral function. The artifacts on which war and hunting scenes are represented are concerned with second Dumézil's function namely "the martial". Plant and animal motifs and some human figure designs such as figures of historical women are related to certain notions such as life and living which could be categorized into the economic function.

**Keywords:** Motif, Archeological Artifacts, Gilan, Dumézil's Trifunctional Model.

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## Introduction

Based on archeological discoveries and historical documents, one could state that in late second millennium B.C. and early first millennium B.C., local tribes living on southern beaches of Caspian Sea had a background of three thousand years old civilization. The archeological findings point to development of a mature and advanced art on those lands which also implied development of science and knowledge, and techniques of making metal, clay and glassy artifacts in the region. The number of golden artifacts discovered from the region signified financial and economic capabilities of people residing in Gilan and more especially in Marlik. The artifacts discovered from the region are highly similar to archeological artifacts discovered in Caucasus, Kelardasht and Hassanloo in Azerbaijan as well as artifacts discovered from Lorestan. Consequently, archeological experts such as Ezatollah Negahban consider Marlik to be an area which is highly influential on arts of other archeological centers that are close to Gilan. In addition, Porada considered artifacts discovered from Marlik to be older than those of Kelardasht and Hassanloo. The present survey seeks to identify, classify and clarify the meanings of motifs of archeological artifacts found in Gilan. The method of matching artifacts discovered from Gilan with Dumézil's trifunctional model (i.e. the sacral, the martial and the economic) is detailed in the present survey.

## Literature Review

Up to now, numerous studies on arts in Gilan region have been conducted. In this regard, one could point to archeological reports on historical sites of Amlash, Talesh, Dylaman and Marlik and major archeological activities by Dr. Ezatollah Negahban (Negahban, 1964) and Dr. Khala'tbari in Tandovin site (Khala'tbari, 2004). On applications of Dumézil's trifunctional model, one could point to "*Benoist and Dumézil*" by Dr. Mokhtarian and "*Study of Three Social Classes in Indo-Iranian Society*" by Tofan Roodbarak which is available online at [www.archeology.ir](http://www.archeology.ir). None of the previous studies are similar to present study in terms of adopting an analytical approach which is premised on Dumézil's trifunctional model. The main argument of present study starts by classification of motifs on archeological works of Gilan and elaboration of their meanings. It ends by matching the designs with three functions of Dumézil's model.

## Theoretical Principles

Georges Dumézil was a major French archeologist and one of the top archeological experts on Indo-European and Indo-Iranian myths (Satari, 2001: 1). Dumézil conducted a comparative

analysis of diverse social and legendary forms of early Indo-European civilizations to conclude that before disintegration and spreading to different lands, the original Indo-European community had a tripartite ideological structure. Later on, immigrating communities took certain elements of the ideology to the lands deemed to be final residential locations of Indo-European tribes. In addition, he believed that the ideology is solely Indo-European (Bahar, 2011: 23-24). In order to study Indo-European religion, culture and language, he introduced a tripartite structure based on which Indo-European communities and its hierarchical system could be interpreted in terms of three functions of the sacral, the martial and the economic.

### **Geography of Gilan**

The region which is currently called Gilan covers an area of 14.700 km<sup>2</sup>. Being located in northern Iran, Gilan has common borders with Azerbaijan Republic and Caspian Sea in northwest and north. Ardebil and Zanzan are located in southwest of Gilan, Qazvin Province is in its south and Mazandaran Province is at its east. Except for its north, other boundaries of Gilan region in different historical periods have changed frequently and they do not match with the lines that currently define Gilan Province (Fakhteh, 2004: 7).

### **Signification of Gilan, Its Tribes and Historical Background**

Gelae (Gilites) is a plural noun signifying Gilan land and its local people. In Arabic, Gilan is called “Al-Jil”. Gilan is the land where Gilites live. About three thousand years ago, the forest-rich Caspian, Cadusian and Gelan lands were located in north of Medes’ lands. Some researchers such as R.N. Frye, Amelie Kuhrt, and Rudiger Schmitt consider Caspian, Cadusian, and Amardiyan tribes to be residents of Gilan and a part of Aryan tribes ([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)).

### **Classification of Artifacts Found in Gilan and Identification of Symbolic Meanings of Motifs**

Among artifacts found in historical sites of Gilan, one could point to four key sites that significantly contributed to identification of arts in Gilan: Amlash, Talesh, Marlik and Daylaman. The designs on archeological significant artifacts found in above-mentioned sites could be divided into five general categories, namely plant motifs, animal motifs, human figure motifs, mixed motifs, and abstract motifs.

## 1- Plant Motifs:

**Tree of life:** Among Plant (herb) motifs on historical artifacts discovered in Gilan, especially Marlik, one could point to “tree of life” which symbolizes life and fertility. In regard to historical artifacts, the tree is usually represented between two human-shaped, animal or herbal guardians. James (1966: 30) believes that the tree and worshipping it constituted one of the old customs of Indo-European tribes. In myths of different nations, tree is addressed as located in the navel of the world. The tree is center of time and space, life and death and it includes all corners of the world in itself (Mokhtarian, 2008: 4). Dr. Negahban (1964: 189) suggests, “tree of life and holy tree played a significant role in setting decoration steps of art traditions of ancient world for thousands of years”. The tree of life which played a central role in decorated scenes was generally used in decorative arts of early first century B.C. The tree was used in most parts of ancient world such as Near East and Middle East. Dr. Negahban suspects that tree of life shows the influence of civilization and art of Marlik on consequent artistic traditions developed in Assyrian, Urartian, Scythian, Median, Achaemenidian and Greek civilizations (ibid. 19).



*Figure 1.* Malik Gold Cup with design of yak-like animals (Negahban, 1964: 185).



*Figure 2.* Marlik Gold Cup with designs of tree of life on a water-filled pot and two mixed entities Tehran National Museum (Stirlin, 2006: 50).

Probably, the most beautiful cup found in Marlik is the cup on which two cows are shown as if they surround a palm tree. As the following figure shows, compared with rest of the protruding figure the heads of cows in right corners turn toward the observer's eyes. Despite of mythical air of depicted animals and their unnatural figure, the designs of the two animals communicate the feelings of powerfulness, livelihood and satisfaction. This is also the case for large wings that turn the cows into supernatural beings (Porada, 1977: 121).

Figure 2 shows another cup on which mixed beings are shown as if they surround the central tree. A cup with water flowing from it and a tree held by heroes were also found designed on an Akkadian seal and on a wall painting in Zimri-Lim's Palace (i.e. Royal Palace of Mary). Dr. Negahban (1964: 222) suggests that Marlik tree could have been modeled on the above-

mentioned design. On cups found in Marlik, another type of design of tree of life could be found which is usually called “cypress tree”. Dr. Negahban (*ibid.*, 228) suggested that although pots or plants between mythical beings were on the ground and smaller than decorative palm trees of other cups, it seems that they play a central role in the scene (figures 3 and 4). In Marlik artifacts, pomegranate designs were also used as frame-making decorative element (Negahban, 2007: 451). Pomegranate is a symbol of fertility. The large number of pomegranate seeds signified abundance and symbolized fertility of Venus. In Iranian myths, pomegranate was considered to be a miraculous and holy fruit (Qolizadeh, 2008: 92).

**Lotus flower:** Most of the containers found in Marlik are decorated with distinctive designs at their bottoms. The decorations used at the bottom of containers are generally geometric medallion-shaped designs.

Some containers show simple medallion-shaped decorations while others show a high level of intricacy (Negahban, 1964: 168). Some of the gold cups found in Marlik site have geometric medallion-shaped decorations that are similar to eight-petal Lotus flower. The same type of flower was used for filling in empty parts of the unicorn-decorated cup discovered from Marlik. The flower is called Lotus, rosette or red flower. The flower was considered to symbolize divine perfection as well as terrestrial suffering. It also symbolizes time and eternity, death and fertility, key of life, perfection and center of being (Cooper, 2007: 311). As specific flower of goddesses, it signifies love, life, creation, fertility and giving birth (*ibid.*). Dr. Negahban (1964: 195, 219 and 294) studied the cups found in Marlik site and suggested that different types of Lotus flower with varying number of petals have been designed on decorated works (figure 6). It should be noted that in current local culture of Gilan, there is a flower called “Baran Titi” with similar arrangement of petals to Lotus flower which was used for decorating the bottom parts of cups found at Marlik site. It is locally believed that picking Baran Titi (meaning: rain flower) is surely followed by rainfall. This local belief signifies the association of flower with wet elements. One could suppose that the flower at the bottom and center of the cups found in Marlik site signifies water, humidity and the core of tree of life. Dr. Negahban (1964: 306) suggests, “Repetition of geometric medallion-shaped decorations on the bottom of most metal cups and containers discovered in Marlik tombs imply that the shape might have another aspect beside of decoration. Maybe, the shape is modeled on religious beliefs of the local tribes and that might be the reason why it is used at the bottom of Marlik cups”. Lotus flowers are not only at the bottoms of Marlik cups but also placed between animal decorations that go all around containers found in Marlik site. The containers show cow and deer shaped decorations that surround tree of life and lotus flower (figures 3

and 4). Similar instances of such visual style could be found on a bronze pot found in northwestern Iran which dates back to 2900-3000 B.C. On the pot, animals belonging to Caprine sub-family are depicted as surrounding lotus flower.



*Figure 3.* Abstraction of tree of life as surrounded by winged cows dating back to 800-1200 B.C. Tehran National Museum (Stirlin, 2006: 50).



*Figure 4.* Gold cup discovered from Marlik with unicorns surrounding a Lotus flower (Negahban, 1964: 198).

## 2- Animal Motifs

The set of archeological works found in Gilan contains diverse animal shapes that are designed in a protruding manner or built into rytons or statues. Cow, goat, deer, horse, leopard and birds among others were the animals used for decoration of artifacts. In this section, animal shapes and their probable meanings are detailed.

**Horse:** In the collection of works discovered in Gilan, horse is used as a theme or an independent design on artistic works. Alternatively, brass, clay and golden cups found in Amlash and Marlik show protruding designs of horses and horse riders (figure 5). Dr. Khala'tbari suggests, "Probably early in second century B.C. (before Iron Age) horse was depicted on clay pots. In early centuries of first millennium B.C, archeological artifacts such as the gold cup and silver cup found in Hassanloo site (belonging to Mannaeans) and the gold cup discovered in Marlik (dating back to 6 century B.C.) signify the role of horse in decoration of discovered artifacts. Before that time, no sign of horse was found on this region (Khala'tbari, 2004: 37). Exploration of the graves dating back to second half of second millennium (start of Iron Age) and early centuries of first millennium B.C. that were located in different part of Lorestan Province, Silk, Hassanloo, Klorez, Shahrn, Marian, and Marlik suggest that horses and their decorations or horses and their owners were buried side by side. Apart from burial traditions of Scythians, such arrangements signify position and significance of horse in the lives of people at the time (ibid.).

*Figure 5. Statue of horse and horse rider made of bronze, early of first century B.C., (Mahboubian, 1997: 218).*



Horse is concurrently a solar and a lunar symbol. Meanwhile, it signifies wetness, sea, initial chaos, gods of oceans and lunar force. A white winged horse signifies cleanliness, wisdom, faultlessness, innocence, life and light. A horse rider is considered to be a hero. Later on, horse was substituted for cow and used to play the role of a victim since it symbolized heavens, gods of fertility, and fertility force of the male as well as forces of underground world and wetness (Cooper, 2007: 20). Based on viewpoints of symbolists and Iranian mythical texts, horse is a water-related symbolical element. On the cups found in Marlik site, the distances between horse-shaped decorations are usually filled with decorative flowers and beautiful geometrical shapes (Negahban, 1964: 33; figure 4).

**Goat and ram:** Among the artifacts found in archeological sites of Gilan, the potteries and bronze artifacts mostly have goat and ram shaped decorations on them. The rams are depicted with larger than normal size horns which seem to be very similar to crescent moon. The rams and their horns alone symbolize the moon (Samadi, 1989: 21). In fact, goat and ram are categorized as lunar and wet symbols. Antelope shapes on potteries are abundantly found in private and public collections that include historical artifacts which had been discovered from Gilan and Mazandaran (Porada, 1977: 141). On Marlik potteries, there are similar designs of different types of rams with delicate decorations. The rams are arranged in a way that they seem to be walking under wings of an eagle and in opposite directions. The protruding profile of bodies of rams, backward looking heads, or full faces looking toward the observers characterize such artifacts (Negahban, 1964: 21).

In belief frameworks of ancient world, eagle is a symbol of divine supporter and power. Prof. Porada suggested that during exploration of Shush site a decorative bird similar to ram or hawk was found on an inlaid piece of gold. The artifact probably dates back to early second half of second millennium B.C. (ibid.). This might be a reason behind influence of Elam art on artistic school of Marlik. Similar ram shapes have been found on the body and bottom of the gold cup recovered from Hassanloo site, embossed designs of Assyrian era and the handset from Zivieh (ibid. 215). In this regard, Ghirshman (1993: 296) writes, “We thought

that animal designs on potteries found in Silk, Hassanloo, Khorvin, Omlash and Lorestan were highly significant. The meanings of these designs are identical with meanings of Urartuian designs”.

**Stag:** Stag-shaped designs are frequently found on archeological artifacts of Gilan such as statues, clay rhytons, bronze figures and embossed designs (figures 6-7). In ancient world, antelopes were made onto the artifacts in resting state. In contrast, a stag is designed on an artifact in a resting mode and paired hoofs. An artifact with such characteristics was found by Ghirshman during his exploration of Amlash and it was declared to date back to 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Another container with stag design on a piece of gold found in Zivieh, hoofs of a stag were designed in a way that they seemed to be resting on each other. The latter artifact was declared by Ghirshman to date back to 7 century B.C. (Porada, 1977: 208).



*Figure 7. Row of stags surrounding lotus flower on golden cup found in Marlik (Ghirschman, 1966: 23).*



*Figure 6. A clay stag-shaped Rhyton discovered from Amlash site (6-12<sup>th</sup> century B.C.; Smithsonian, 1965: 89).*

Small stag-shaped statues were discovered from Marlik. They had holes in them to enable the user to attach them to his/her belt (ibid. 142). The statues found in similar archeological sites showed stags in resting mode. More specifically, the hoofs of back legs were on each other and this mode of representation was detailed for Marlik site long before characterization of similar Scythian artifacts in archeology (Negahban, 1964: 209). It should be noted that the most significant and unique theme of Scythian art is stag. Initially, stag was worshipped by Siberian tribes but later in Scythian era, stag lost most of its religious significance. However, it is probable that the belief of transfer of the soul of the deceased to another world by stag was common in Eurasia during first century B.C. This might also justify stag-shaped design on burial artifacts (Rice, 2001: 23). From a symbolic viewpoint, stag is an archeological representation of the new spring (Chevalier, 2008: 771). “Hind was one of the manifestation of mother goddess. During Stone Age, hind statues were paid a lot of attention since the animal was a significant source of food. Mountain gazelle and reindeer were similar to cows in having rapidly growing horns and that is why those animals symbolize rising moon and

represent the principles of birth and life. The symbol has been frequently used in accompaniment with tree of life” (Cooper, 2007: 315).

**Cow:** In the collection of artifacts discovered from different archeological sites of Gilan, numerous and diverse representations of cow in the form of bronze statue, pottery or embossed designs on gold cups have been found. Natural and abstract forms of the animal have been designed on artistic works. One of the most beautiful depictions of cow is probably the one found on artifact discovered from Marlik.

The naturalistic representation of cow design on Marlik artifacts suggests that they were temporally modeled on a distinct artistic tradition of Assyrian era. The way of working cow heads into a free shapes and taking benefit of surrounding space suggest alignment with Elamite customs. In fact, the old tradition was resumed by artists of Susa (figure 1; Porada, 1977: 123). Horses and cows were designed as if they were walking around on containers discovered from Marlik. Their bodies were embossed, their heads pointed outward and proportions were perfect (ibid. 121). From a symbolic viewpoint, cow is a lunar and wet animal. The oldest available documents suggest that gods of heavens and weather emerged in the form of stag and goddesses were their wives (Cooper, 2007: 301).

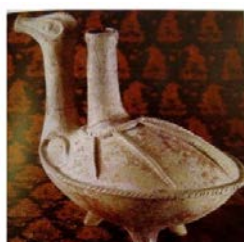


*Figure 8. Bronze cow statue found in Dylaman dating back to 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Mahboubian, 1997: 228).*

**Lion:** As evidenced by archeological artifacts of Gilan, lion is among those animals which is designed independently or along with tree of life in scenes of hunting for goats, or in scenes in which lion is on back of a stag. Compared with number of cow, stag and goat designs, artifacts with lion designs on them are few. Figure 1 shows a container found in Amlash on which a lion is designed in a way that it seems to be jumping on neck of a stag. On the lion's neck, Swastika sign is embossed. From a symbolic viewpoint, the fight between cow and lion signifies the victory of spring over winter. Lion symbolizes heat and summer while stag symbolizes winter (Abeddoost, 2009: 98). The theme is semantically consistent with the scene designed at the bottom of the container. The lower scene shows the tree of life among mixed beings (i.e. a tripartite model). The star sign on the lion's body is protruding so as to emphasize alignment with star signs (ibid.). “Lion is a symbol of sun. On one hand, lions are symbolic guardians of tombs, palaces and shrines. It was commonly believed that their aggressiveness might inhibit from unfavorable effect” (Hall, 2001: 61). On the other hand, in

Marlik site the lions at both side of the central tree have their back to the tree and seem to be moving away from it (Negahban, 1964: 292).

**Bird:** In local art and culture of Gilan, art plays a special role. The local people of Gilan regard the birds as messengers of livelihood, spring, and good news. The historical artifacts of the land depict birds in various forms. Bird-shaped potteries and rytons, bird-shaped bronze statues as well as designs of birds beside of tree of life on gold cups of Marlik are noteworthy instances.



*Figure 9.* Bird-shaped clay ryton found in graveyard of Amlash (Jahani, 2008: figure 99).



*Figure 10.* Marlik cup with designs of sitting cow, swimming fish at the top and lotus flower at the bottom (Negahban, 1964: 180).

The bird-shaped bronze statue is actually design of a peacock that dates back to 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C (Mahboubian, 1997: 228). On some archeological artifacts recovered from Gilan, designs of animals show them facing against each other. A hanger found in Marlik has a design of two bird heads that are bonded together (Negahban, 1964: 421). Symbolically, bird bonds heavens and earth (Baring, 1991: 59). “Larger birds often symbolize solar, wind or thunder gods and their language is lightening. The design of birds beside of tree symbols show the significant role of birds as they embodied the divine force which falls on tree or its symbol, a column. Two birds on a tree signify dualities of light and darkness, night and day, determination and indetermination and two hemispheres” (Cooper, 2007: 71).

Among the artifacts found in Gilan, the containers with long tubes modeled on fish-eating birds (burial containers) are highly significant and instances of such containers have been discovered in excavated archeological sites of Gilan dating back to Iron Age (e.g. Marlik, Joban Jamshid Abad, etc.) as well as sites in central plateau of Iran (e.g. Khorvin, Varamin, and Qaitarieh). In this era, the pottery artists used long tubes and artistic twists to take the art of pottery towards higher degrees of naturalism (Khala'tbari, 2004: 42).

**Fish:** On one of the containers found in Marlik, fish is designed very beautifully. Sitting cows are embossed at the bottom of the containers and swimming fishes decorate the top part of the gold cup. Bottom of the cup is decorated by lotus flower designs and sitting posture of cows reminds one of Scythian art. Semantics of symbols of fish shows a connection with other designs and decorations of the container. Lotus flower, cow and fish are all wet elements and related to notion of fertility (figure 10). “Fish is a symbol of water and it is related to notion of birth or regeneration” (Chevalier, 2007: 140). “Fish symbolizes life and fertility. The fish curse is associated with raining” (ibid., 141).

### 3- Mixed Animal Motifs

Among artifacts found in archeological sites of Gilan, one also encounters designs of mixed entities with distinct characteristics. Such designs convey the feelings of ultimate power, delicacy and beauty. Unicorn and winged cow as well as phoenix or griffin, sphinx, and mythical gods are instances of such designs (Negahban, 1964: 443).

A container found in Marlik represents an imaginary being (probably gryphon or phoenix) which is designed in a way that conveys a feeling of movement from right to left. The mythical being has the head of a bird, crown on its head, protruding and strong wings and body of a female lion. Therefore, it refers to mythical beings (ibid. 216). (Figure. 11)



Figure 11. Mythical scene showing unification of male and female forces and mixed entities guarding tree of life on a golden cup from Marlik (Negahban, 1964: 236).



Figure 12. Gold cup of Marlik showing a mixed creature holding two sphinxes (Negahban, 1964: 251).

In an article, Prof. Azarpai has addressed griffin and discussed different designs of griffin on objects found in Pazirik. He suggests that the design dates could be traced back to the objects made during Ur era (i.e. third century B.C). After further developments, the design became highly popular in second half of second millennium B.C and since then, it has been frequently used on archeological artifacts made in all over the ancient world. On the Marlik cup, one of the most decorative instance of an imaginary griffin being was designed. Griffin is a mythical bird with beak and wings of eagle and a lion's body. The symbolism of griffin has

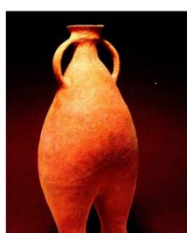
commonalities with symbolism of lion and eagle. This fact reinforces the evidence that point to the solar nature of griffin. In fact, griffin is associated both with heavens and the earth. In fact, griffin links the earthly power of lion to heavenly power of the eagle. So, griffin is a general symbol of salvation forces. For Hebrews, griffin symbolizes Iran since ancient Iranians used the griffin design frequently (Chevalier, 2007: 733). On a gold container found in Marlik which dated back to 800-1200 B.C., designs of winged griffins were used at the top and winged cows were at the bottom. Winged cows surrounded a small tree of life. Such designs had traditional applications (Sterlin, 2006: 50). “Sphinx is another mysterious creature which was designed on a gold cup discovered from Marlik (ibid.). It has a human head, body of a lion and wings of hawk. From a symbolic viewpoint, it is concurrently a protective element, a symbol of power and god of sun and it represents the combination of four elements of rational, physical, natural and supernatural forces” (Cooper, 2007: 14). This mixed creature is often regarded as guardian of holy elements. As shown in the following figure, the gold cup has designs of two mythical creatures which are characterized by a combination of human and animal organs. These mystical creatures stand before each other and keep each other’s hands. The profiles of bodies of these imaginary creatures are represented since their heads point to sideways. As a result, their face faces the observers. In the distance between them, a pot with a decorative tree in it lies both of which seem to be on the ground. One of the imaginary creatures is male and the other is female. The male creature has a human body and its chest seems to be covered by delicate feathers. In addition, two pairs of large wings are on its shoulders. The hands and legs of the creature are modeled on human figure. The female creature has a decorative crown or a headband, a human body and lion’s legs. The creature’s chest is covered by delicate feathers but only a pair of wings is on its shoulders (Negahba, 1964: 235; figure 11). It seems that the scene depicts a mythical story or shows an association between real god and mythical gods (ibid. 237).

“The pot or plants between the two mythical creatures are designed in a way that they seem to be on the ground. Although plants seem to be smaller than decorative palm trees embossed on other similar cups, it seems that they act as central scene. The bottom of the cup shows a design of decoratively beautiful and geometric bergamot” (ibid. 238). Another gold cup shows an imaginary creature with a pair of lion heads which show their aggression by opening their mouths. The creature with wide wings, torso, chest and hands of human, lower body covered by fish scales or feathers and legs and paws of a bird make center of the show (figure 12). This mythical creature is designed twice at either sides of the plate and its wide open hands hang up two imaginary creatures that are symmetrically at opposite sides of its body. The pair of smaller imaginary creatures are probably sphinxes which have a combination of human head, bird wing, lion body and a long tail (ibid.252). Similar design

was found on another cup which had been discovered in Amlash. On the latter cup, a winged lion holding gazelles is designed (Ghirshman, 1993: 33).

#### 4- Human Motifs

On the artifacts found in archeological sites, protruding designs of human figure were found beside of clay and bronze figure-shaped statues. The statues show distinct characteristics. The figure-shaped artifacts found in Marlik show exaggerated flanks (Negahban, 1964: 141; figure 13, right). Some sources introduce these figure-shaped statues as reminiscent of the holy religion of mother goddess (www.Howardnews.com). In addition to those artifacts, one could point to bronze works of art discovered in Dylaman and Amlash. The latter artifacts show designs of a goddess with her child (figure 13, left).



*Figure 14.* A reddish orange container with two human-like legs found in south of Caspian Sea. 1000 B.C. (Kavami, 1992, fig 7).

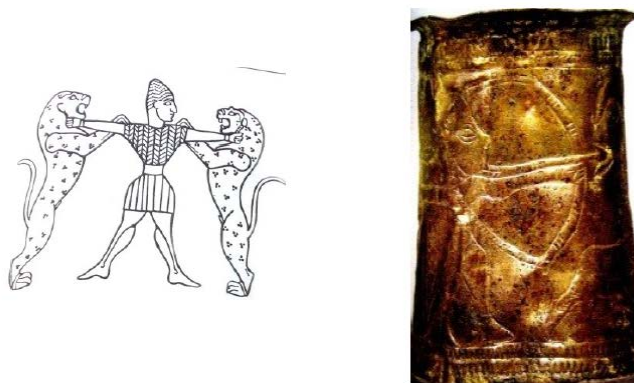


*Figure 13.* Statue of goddess and her child combined with a wheel (left) dating back to 6-8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Mahboubian, 1997: 249), and statue of a female figure found in Marlik dating back to 2897 years ago (Davodi, 2003: 15).

“Among the historical works found by exploration of Merian Cemetery but rarely recovered from other archeological sites of the province, one could point to fat-burning lights. Apart from decorative function, these artifacts had been vertically modeled on animal or human figures. The artifacts found in above-mentioned cemetery date back to early centuries of first millennium B.C. numerous instances of rytons found during explorations of De Morgan site date back to second half of second millennium B.C (Khala’tbari, 2004: 181). The clay statues modeled on human figure and animals were hallowing since they were used for maintaining liquids. Based on prevalent religious beliefs of the time, those statues were probably buried with the dead (ibid. figure 14). Imitating statue makers, the metalworkers of the time made metal figures with protruding pelvis or figures which seem to be riding a horse.

“A silver cup with design of a restrained leopard is noteworthy in the sense that one side of the cup shows a skilled high-ranked warrior restraining two leopards with his wide apart hands. On the other side of the cup, there is an old and leafless tree which has some flowers and fruits on the head of its branches and at the top of the tree, there is an antelope. Some scientists believe that the design of a high-ranked warrior with short skirt and wide belt found in Babylon and Bogazkoy probably refers to Teshub which was one of the Mitanni and Hittite

gods” (Negahban, 1964: 248; figure 15). As Prof. Porada and Prof. Dyson suggested, the design on silver cup of Marlik site signifies a hero or a wind deity which could be compared and associated with the design on the gold cup of Hassanloo as the latter shows a warrior fighting against the mountain monster. The decorative designs of clothes, strong and stylized muscles and special shape of legs and muscles show many similarities between the silver cup designs and shape of the skirt of the high-ranked warriors on Hassanloo cup (ibid.248). Another silver cup found in Amlash site shows a hunter during hunting (figure 15, right).



*Figure 15.* Silver cup with soldier and panther design (Negahban, 1964: 245; left), and Amlash cup showing a hunter design (Iran National Museum; Jahani, 2008: figure 97; right).

Among human figure-shaped statues recovered from archeological sites of Gilan, one could to see male and female statues of horse and stag riders dating back to late second millennium B.C. (Mahboubian, 1997: 249). It is probable that the horse riders symbolized a definite a god or a distinct deity. Ghirshman (1993: 296) suggests, “We suspect that design of animals on containers found in Silk, Hassanloo, Khorovin, Amlash and Lorestan are highly significant. The meanings of such designs seem to be identical with meanings of Urartian designs”. The royal Urartian inscriptions suggest that thousands of horses were being trained on high plateaus and it is probable that Urartian people believed in gods that were related to the animal. Therefore, it is possible that the small bronze artifact that shows a deity sitting on a horse refers to a horse goddess” (ibid. 299).

## **5- Abstract Motifs**

The archeological artifacts of Gilan include a set of abstract motifs. The set of motifs include circles, square, continuous triangles, zigzag lines, spiral lines, dentate lines, intertwining lines, shaded lines, interconnected squares, triangles inside each other were the abstract lines that were inspired by solar beams.

## **Dumézil's Trifunctional Model and Comparison of it with Designs on Archeological Artifacts of Gilan**

Dumézil is a major French mythologist who made noteworthy statements on Indo-European tribes and his trifunctional classification. He suggests, "Indo-Europeans were living somewhere between Baltic Sea and Caspian Sea or more precisely, between Danube and Ural. These tribes could understand each other's language despite of talking with different dialects. They should have the same intellectual system" (Satari, 2001: 24). The triclass structure of Dumézil's model is as detailed in the following:

*The first class consists of brahmana or priests. The second class includes rājanya or warriors and the third class is made up of vaiśya or farmers. The analysis of the first function is quickly done based on the pair of gods "Mitra" and "Verona". The function is completed by summation of two gods one of which creates the heavenly god and a god which is engaged in human's sorrows. The latter god epitomizes the principles of law and judgment and it is pacifier and organizer. The second function is warfare-related which cannot be organized easily since war and manifestation of power are riddled with unexpected events. The third function (i.e. economic function) does not offer a general definition. The significant things to pay attention to regarding such a function are planting and eating. Therefore, the third function is dependent on time, place and characteristics of the earth. The function includes fertility of animal and human which easily makes it opposite to second function since war and peace are opposites. In the list of Vedic gods, Asvins represents the third function (ibid. 18).*

There are cases in which existence of the three functions is theoretically probable. This means that because the tripartite structure is highly distributed, it is suspected that one of the three functions fades or deviates from its original mode and such a case makes the structure rich with suspicion and doubt (ibid. 20). The conceptual framework is settled in public mind and through their minds, it has penetrated into institutions, myths and other aspects of their lives. In cases in which the three functions were very close to each other and they all manifested themselves in a character, Indo-Europeans wanted to integrate the functions into a unit (ibid. 21).

The results of archeological explorations and studies conducted in Gilan Province suggest that situation of man living in current Gilan Province before Iron Age or in better terms at the end of Bronze Age (1400-1600 B.C.) was highly ambiguous because no trace of human residence before Iron Age could be found in the region. Some experts believe that Gilan was not essentially inhabitable before Iron Age (i.e. 1400-1500 B.C.) due to environmental and ecologic condition of the region. It was after that definite age that Gilan turned into a place of

huge wealth, numerous residential locations and significant level of technology. At this time, the flood of immigrants from Arian tribes into Iranian Plateau and naturally Gilan was changing the scene (Khala'tbari, 2008: 25). Since some archeologists consider the tribes living in southern coasts of Caspian Sea to be immigrants that entered Iran from Caucasian region at the beginning of Iron Age, Dr. Negahban considers the artifacts discovered in Marlik to belong to Amardians (one of Indo-European tribes) (ibid. 16). Therefore, one could use Dumézil's model to study the artifacts of Gilan region.

The artifacts discovered from Gilan also includes a set of mixed creatures that seem to be representations of deities. Griffins and sphinxes with a combination of human head and bodies of lion and eagle are major instances of such creatures (figures 11-12). This category of artifacts could be regarded a part of Brahman class. The second category is made up of *rājanya* class. An artifact showing a high-ranked warrior fighting against lions as well those artifacts that show a human using a bow and arrows for hunt are instances of the second class (figure 15). The third category is economical (i.e. farming) which includes animals, plants and notions of fertility and earth. Symbols of certain animals such as horse, goat, cow, stag, fish and birds such as duck are categorized into the third category of functions since symbolic notions of this category are associated with wet elements such as water and moon (figure 10). Most artifacts found in Gilan belong to this category. Tree of life depicted between pairs of animals and protected by them is an instance of this category (figures 1, 2, 3 and 11). Lotus flower at the bottom of Marlik cups and Lotus flower in the center of tree of life and protected by animals is a design that is correctly classified into the third category too (figures 4, 7, and 10). This might be due to the fact that lotus flower (an earthly symbol) is associated with water. Among abstract symbols, one could point to circles, square, continuous triangles, zigzag lines, spiral lines, dentate lines, intertwining lines, shaded lines, interconnected squares, and triangles inside each other (signifying mountain) as earthly symbols. Human-shaped designs, statues modeled on females with highlighted fertility-related features and bronze statues of breastfeeding women could all be classified as the third category since economical function was related to notion of fertility (figures 13 and 14). As Dumézil suggested, in this tri-functional model some of the functions are less frequently highlighted than others. In artifacts found in Gilan, championship and bravery pattern (e.g. hunting) as well as priesthood and divine pattern are more infrequently represented than farming and economic pattern. In some cases, instances of sacral function (first royal function) is combined with third function which is accompanied by notion of fertility. As an instance, one could point to designs in which tree of life is surrounded by mythical and divine creatures. Such artifacts are consistent with social structure of people living in north of Iran most of whom were farmers and animal farmers. Compared with Elamite artifacts which are frequently decorated by scenes of worship and religious practices, the artifacts found in Gilan depict such scenes to a lesser degree. Since archeological excavations in Gilan are limited, one could hope that new discoveries might show higher consistency of three functions of Dumézil's model with future artifacts in Gilan.

<b>Dumézil's Trifunctional Model:</b>	<b>Motifs on Artifacts Discovered from Archeological Sites of Gilan</b>
Third function of Dumézil's model: economic function / fertility	1- Plant motifs, (lotus, tree of life) symbol of life
Third function of Dumézil's model: economic function/fertility	2- Animal motifs (hors, stag, lion, cow, fish, bird, goat and ram ) lunar and humid symbol
a: second function of Dumézil's model "martial function"  b: third function of Dumézil's model: economic function/fertility	3-Human Motifs a: soldier and panther design & hunter design b: female figure
First function of Dumézil's model: sacral and divine manifestations	4- Mixed Animal Motifs
-----	5-Abstract Motifs

*Table 1:* Classification the motifs on artifacts discovered from archeological Sites of Gilan based on Dumézil's trifunctional

## Conclusion

Gilan is located in southern coasts of Caspian Sea. Historical artifacts of the region are often attributed to the period after Indo-Iranian tribe immigrated to Iran. The set of motifs on artifacts discovered in Gilan could be categorized into plant, animal, human and abstract groups. Among such designs, plant motifs are mostly related to notions of life and fertility. Tree of life, Lotus flower and pomegranate are the prevalent instances of this category of designs and related to third function of Dumézil's model since they convey the notion of

fertility. The protruding animal designs worked out on clay and bronze statues which were found in Gilan region are mostly related to symbolically wet elements such as goat, cow, horse, stag and bird. Such animal elements are often accompanied by plant-shaped symbols. Some of the symbols are lunar and humid which imply their association with notion of life. These two groups of designs could be considered as instances of third function of Dumézil's model. Sphinxes, griffins and mixed creatures (combination of lion's body, human or eagle head) are sacral and divine manifestations. These elements are depicted along with herbal symbols such as tree of life and they could represent the notions of priesthood and divine worship. Consequently, they are categorized into first group of functions. The designs of walking hunters, hunting horse riders and high-ranked warriors dominating and restraining wild animals are conceptually related to second function of Dumézil's model namely "martial function". Among these three functions, artifacts found in Gilan are mostly concerned with the third function namely "the economic" which itself is associated with farming and fertility. The artifacts associated with first function, the sacral, is closely associated with the third function. The second function, the martial, is less frequently reflected in artifacts found in Gilan region.

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