

## Investigating the Evolution of the Mountain Symbol and Form in Persian Miniature

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### ABSTRACT

This article deals with the importance of the evolution of mountains in Iranian painting from the point of view of form and symbol. From the Mongol period and the height of painting to the end of the Safavid period, mountains as a natural element have had different forms and had meanings and symbols. The trend of mountain shapes from the Mongol period to the Qajar period includes the transformation to private. Mountains have undergone changes in terms of concepts, textures, layering of mountains, as well as simple or complex lines, which can be seen with the existing surveys. The results show that the mountain has a special place in most of the paintings for conveying feelings as well as subjects. By covering a large amount of the frame, the mountain conveys its theme in the form of background and coloring and the use of relevant forms.

#### Keywords:

Mountain,  
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## Introduction

Miniature means the art and profession of illustration and painting on different surfaces using pen and paint. miniatures and painters consider this art as a combined art in which image and text are combined. They emphasize that painting is a distinct art from painting due to the special features of the lines and colors used in it.

Miniature, as a distinct art field, has its own characteristics that distinguish it from other visual arts such as painting. These features include:

1. Combination of text and image: Art painting is a combination in which text and image are integrated and presented in a unified way.
2. The use of curved lines and transparent colors: painting uses curved lines and transparent and decorative colors that make it different from painting.
3. Illustration with pen and paint: Painting is a visual art in which the illustration is done using pen and paint on different surfaces.
4. Variety of topics: Painting has a variety of topics including literary, historical, religious themes, etc., which introduces it as an independent art field.

Therefore, miniature is known as an independent art discipline with its own characteristics.

The petroglyphs of Dusheh, Mirmelas and Humian caves show scenes of war and hunting with bows and arrows, quadrupeds such as horses, deer, foxes, mountain goats and dogs. These pictures are drawn in a simple and basic style with black, yellow and ocher colors. Most of them thematically belong to the beliefs of the first primitive humans (animism). In these petroglyphs, sometimes the whole face of a human being is shown, and the images of animals are also shown. The importance of these petroglyphs is that they are the first manifestation of the artistic taste of the cave-dwelling people of Lorestan's Kohdasht region (Pakzad, 2021; Qurashi, 2010; Yahaghi, 1996 & Campbell, 2008).



**Figure 1. Hunting ground, Doshe petroglyphs in Lorestan, Kurshurab Strait**

Wall paintings had a two-fold role in ancient Iranian civilizations: 1. decorative, 2. educational. This type of art could not only provide the means to elevate people's religious beliefs, but it was also a tool to show off the power of kings and those in power.

The mountain has been manifested in different ways and forms in the cultures formed in the plateau of Iran, and in terms of its high and holy position, it has been inspired in the creation of abstract symbols and signs and has been used in motifs with various themes. In the Islamic period of Iran, the mountain not only maintains its previous meaning, but with the cultural richness that occurs in this period, it also carries broader concepts of religious and mystical thinking. In the Aryan culture, the mountain has been associated with the sun, light, brilliance and glory. The sanctity of mountains and land in Iranian mythology is such that in the *Shahnameh*, Fereydun imprisoned Zahak in Mount Damavand, and Ki Khosro went to the mountain with that mystic attraction and disappeared.

In Iranian miniature and painting, symbols play a very important role and often have deep and extensive meanings beyond their surface level. Based on the research done, symbols in Iranian painting can be divided into three general categories:

1. Natural symbols: such as the sun, moon, stars, trees, animals, etc., which have cosmic and mythological meanings.
2. Religious and mythological symbols: such as divine figures, prophets, saints and concepts related to Iranian religious beliefs and myths.
3. Cultural and social symbols: such as clothes, utensils, tools and other cultural elements that express social and cultural themes.

In the Bible, the rock is a symbol of God's power and support. The rock is the symbol of Saint Peter. The name Peter comes from the Greek word *petros*, which means rock. *Petros* is Greek for rock. In Greek mythology, the evil king of Crete, Sisyphus, was punished to lift a large boulder up a mountain and watch it roll down and do it again and again. In Avesta, the holy book of Iranians, the mountain is considered one of the holy places with attributes such as: purity, heaven and comfort. The most complete account of creation in Pahlavi texts is described in the book "*Banhadesh*". In this book, all the mountains are holy and are in direct connection with us on earth (*Spandar Mazd*) and are considered its children, and on the other hand, they are in connection with the sky (as the first creation of the material world). In the legend of Gilgamesh, the Babylonian gods were placed on the holy mountain, and Sidori Sabituzen was called the wise man of the mountain of heaven. Also, in mythology, we are faced with exemplary and holy mountains that connect the world with this earth and are the manifestation of God and the best way for man to reach the world. In Iranian mythology, Mount Alborz is the place of bright Yazidi scales, measuring good deeds and knowledge. Belief in the mysterious sanctity of the mountain

and the role of forgiveness in connection with the transcendental world has permeated the great religions of the world. Most of the prophets have revealed their religion to people from the mountains and their occult communication has been established in the mountains where they have found an exemplary situation. One of the points of belief in ancient Iran is the sanctity of mountains and the proximity of this glorious manifestation of nature with the sky, which made it the owner of a double sanctity. Ferdowsi, who grew up in Islamic culture, found and knew the essence of mysticism in the epics and consciously used the secret of the mountains where the dragons and Divan slept. He should depict both the real history of ancient Iran and their monotheistic culture and vision. In the Jewish Bible, the Torah, the mountain is considered a holy and transcendental place of the divine spirit. Hara is a mountain one farsakh north of Mecca. The Prophet of Islam used to go to this mountain a lot before his mission and worshiped there. In the Holy Quran about the creation of mountains, different and meaningful expressions can be seen (Ferdowsi, 1995; Vahidi, 1995; Jung, 2016; Mittford, 2008; Yazdani and Zohoori, 2023; Yazdani and Zohoori, 2022).

In the following, the progress and development of the symbol and form of the mountain in the painting of different periods have been investigated, which includes the schools of Shiraz, Herat, Tabriz II, Safavid etc.

In (Figure 2) from the first Shiraz school, the death of Tus and Fariborz and Giv and Bijan in the middle of the snow is a page from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. In this image, the mountains show depth, as a part of the rear mountain is hidden behind the front mountain. At the foot of the mountains, we see the image of animals, and on the slopes and sides of the mountain, we see the human body. In this picture, the central part is made up of mountains, and the shape of the mountains is triangular and very pointed.



Figure 2. The picture of the death of Tus and Friborz and Giv and Bijan in the middle of the snow

Bargah Kiyomarth Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasabi by Sultan Muhammad around 931 AH in Tabriz II Safavid school. In (Figure 3), mountains and rocks can be seen covering the background. Kyumarth is located in the mountain and all the creatures are gathered around it. It's as if the mountains and rocks have come to life and are on display in the splendor of Kyumarth. The artist has made this fantasy look very real as if the rocks and mountains have opened their mouths from its glory and have placed Kyumarth like a jewel in them. The variety of colors is very beautiful, the delicate layering of the rocks, the texture of their faded colors has increased the beauty of this work (Mittford, 2008; Ghezelayagh, Fooladian, and Khoshmardan, 2020).



**Figure 3. The Court of Kiyomarth by Sultan Muhammad in the Tahmasbi Shahnameh (Tabriz II-Safawi school)**

In (Figure 4) the Herat school, we see Bahram fighting a dragon. The background of this painting is boldly used in warm colors, especially yellow and orange, and we see a horse that is the same color as the background. The valleys and mountains are interwoven and it comes out from the left side of the frame. This battle took place in the mountains. On the right side, we see a tree with a dragon on it. We see rocks and stones that are scattered and close to the dragon's cave. Distant rocks are shown in cool color. The other half of the dragon's body is hidden among the rocks.





**Figure 4. The Battle of Bahram Gur with the Dragon from Khamsa Nizami by Kamaluddin Behzad (898 AH), Herat School**

In (Figure 5) of Khosrow and Shirin (first school of Shiraz, Al Muzafar), we see that all the events take place on the slopes of the mountains. In the background, mountains are lined up horizontally. The mountain range covers a large part of the picture on which the characters are based. On the ground, we see many plants that are placed together at regular intervals, and a cedar tree that is next to Shirin is curved. This cedar looks very calm. The peace and vastness of the scenery can be seen more in this work. Due to its romantic nature, the subjects make their elements very delicate. Here, the environment is subordinate to the elements (Yahaghi, 1996; Campbell, 2008; Ferdowsi, 1995; Vahidi, 1995; Jung, 2016).



**Figure 5. Illustration of Khosrow and Shirin Shiraz I Al Muzaffar (Military Khamse of the late AH-AH century)**

### **Artistic and Practical Work Process**

The theme of the paintings done is related to the mountain and rocks of Hormuz Island. Hormuz is an island known for its colored mountains and colored soil. Due to the proximity of this island to the writer's place of residence, I have a special attachment to this island, so I decided that the topic of the article should be about the nature itself and the mountains and rocks of this beautiful island. All works are done with oil paint technique and expressionism style.

#### ***The First Drawing***

This painting is 30x40 with expressionism style and oil paint on paper (Figure 6). The painting is the valley of rainbows. The big stone located in this valley is known as the hands of God. Red, yellow, etc. colored mountains cover this valley. This valley is called rainbow because of the variety of colors.



**Figure 6. The first drawing, rainbow**

#### ***The Second Drawing***

This painting is 30x40 with expressionism style and oil paint on paper. The painting shows the Valley of the Statues. Due to their special shapes and their forms, it is known as the valley of statues, which is considered one of the attractions of this island.



**Figure 7. The second drawing, Valley of the statues**

### ***The Third Painting***

The Figure 8 is a 60x80 painting with expressionism style and oil on canvas. This work is also from the Valley of Rainbows.



**Figure 8. The third drawing, Valley of rainbows**

### ***The Fourth Drawing***

The Figure 9 is a 30x40 painting with expressionism style and oil paint on cardboard. This painting is from the "Hormoz" collection. Saffron Valley is one of Hormuz's most famous places, which is named for its unique yellow rock salt.





**Figure 9. The fourth drawing, Saffron Valley**

### ***The Fifth Drawing***

The Figure 10 is a 30x40 painting with expressionism style and oil paint on cardboard. This painting is from the "Hormoz" collection. In this work, I have painted the Goddess of Salt, which is one of the unique attractions of Hormuz Island. The goddess of salt is a mountain of salt crystals that can be seen with various and beautiful colors.



**Figure 10. The fifth drawing, goddess of salt**

## **Conclusion**

The trend of mountain shapes from the Mongol period to the Qajar period includes the transformation to private. Mountains have undergone changes in terms of concepts, textures, layering of mountains, as well as simple or complex lines, which can be seen with the existing surveys. The investigated case is the Mughal school with the Shiraz school, which in the Mughal school shows the mountain in such a way that the movement of the lines of the mountains shown is very rough and sharp and long. It can also be said that mountains are in harmony with subjects. According to the war topics of this school, the mountains have forms and shapes that match the topic. Caves and rocks cover most of the frame due to the thematic atmosphere of war and violence. But in the Shiraz school, according to the subjects of this school, which are mostly social, these forms become soft and flexible and convey the feeling of peace and tenderness in the landscapes. Also, in the works of the examined schools, we will come to the conclusion that in addition to the general form and state of the mountains, their color and position have a significant impact on the composition of paintings. The difference is palpable in Jalarian's school, where the mountain is implemented as a background and strongly blurred. But in the Herat school, the mountains are visible and interwoven and the main subject of the painting, which includes a large amount of frames.

It can be added here that cold colors such as gray or blue are used in war subjects, unlike social subjects. In the case of Shiraz school, where the social theme is dominant, the mountains have warmer colors, which can be referred to as red or orange. On the other hand, by examining the Isfahan school, we can come to the conclusion that the mountain has the lowest position in this school. In fact, there is no sign of the mountain in the paintings of this period, and figures, unlike other schools, have the main role to express the concept and subject. In the end, it can be concluded that the mountain has a special place in most of the paintings for conveying feelings as well as subjects. By covering a large amount of the frame, the mountain conveys its theme in the form of background and coloring and the use of relevant forms.

## **Author Contributions**

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization of the article and writing of the original and subsequent drafts.

## **Data Availability Statement**

Not applicable

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The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Islamic Azad University, Yazd Branch. The authors avoided data fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and misconduct.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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