

Persian translation of this paper entitled:
بازتاب شکلی نقوش ساسانی در تزئینات گچ‌بری خانه-قلعه بنی‌امری
is also published in this issue of journal.

Original Research Article

An Investigation of the Reflection of Sasanian Motifs in the Stucco Decoration of Bani Ameri's Castle-like House

Zahra Partov¹, Zahra Masoudi Amin^{*2}

1. Master of Graphic Design, Islamic Azad University, Yazd Branch, Yazd, Iran.

2. Faculty Member, Department of Graphic Design, Faculty of Art, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran.

Received:12/09/2019 ; revised:21/01/2020 ; accepted:25/01/2020 ; available online: 22/10/2020

Abstract

Problem statement: The decoration is one of the main foundations of architecture art. Ornamentation using plant motifs in different artistic ways has been a response to the human need for nature and its preservation in the environment. Hājīyābād Village in Varamin has been a tourism target. The village is located 25 kilometers east of the historical city of Varamin at the gate of the desert and has mansions dating back 400 years to the Zandieh and Qajar periods. One of these buildings is Bani-Ameri's castle-like house which has been registered as the national monuments of Varamin. This monument is at the risk of being ruined. Lack of residence, abandonment, and lack of care and maintenance of the building have exacerbated the damage process and have destroyed one of the turrets. According to the owner of this building, this monument is 250 years old and belongs to the period of Fath Ali Shah Qajar and built based on Iranian-Islamic architecture (four-Ivans). The castle-like house is variously decorated by plant, animal, human, and geometric motifs.

Research objective: The purpose of the research was to re-examine the identity of the stucco motifs in this mansion. To answer this question that which historical period has influenced the shape of stucco motifs in Bani-Ameri's castle-like house, we carried out a field study in Hājīyābād Village in Varamin and we analyzed the decorations of stucco motifs of this building. Based on this assumption that the shapes of stucco motifs of this building had been influenced by the works in Sassanid, we examined to see if Bani Ameri's motifs correspond with the decorative motifs of the Sassanid period.

Research method: This historical study is descriptive-analytical in nature. We gathered the data from documents and observations to examine the extent to which decorations match the Sassanid tradition.

Conclusion: With regard to the strong historical background of architecture in Varamin, the relics belonging to the Sassanid period, and based on the studies and careful examination of motifs in the house-castle of Bani Ameri, we found significant similarities between the motifs of this house with those of the Sassanid period. Analyzing visual qualities, form, architectural technology, content, and symbolic meaning of the designs as well as the paintings of this house confirmed that the influence of the motifs from the art in the Sassanid period.

Keywords: *Motifs, Stucco, Decoration, Sassanid Period, Qajar Period, Bani Ameri's House, Varamin City.*

* Corresponding author: masoudiamin@alzahra.ac.ir, +989121063637

Introduction

The living space of an individual has the greatest influence on his soul, his mind, and his satisfaction with life. That might explain why the decoration of buildings which depends on the lifestyle of humans has been considered an architectural necessity and why it has undergone changes through various historical periods. This has resulted in creating a variety of styles and methods in the field. One way of decoration in Iran is stuccoing which has influenced the identity of buildings in different periods. In Qajar architecture, stuccoing was also one of the popular ways of decoration used in the architecture of public places and private buildings of well-off people. One of the monuments is the Bani-Ameri's castle-like house in the village of Hājjiyābād in Varamin. This building dates back to about two hundred years ago, the period of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar. It contains different decorations of which stuccoing is the most important. Despite the existence of archeological ruins from different historical periods, no comprehensive study has been carried out on them. This is of great concern because buildings have been left empty and demolished. As these buildings are part of Iranian-Islamic culture, paying attention to their architecture and decoration is essential.

By examining the decorations of stucco motifs of Bani-Ameri's castle-like house, this study attempts to answer the following question: Which historical period has influenced the shape of stucco motifs in Bani-Ameri's castle-like house? It was assumed that the stuccos of Bani-Ameri's castle-like house reflect the decorative motifs of the Sassanid.

Research Methodology

This historical study is a descriptive-analytical in nature. This study was an attempt to understand the degree to which the motifs of stuccos in Bani-Ameri's castle-like house match with the ones in the Sassanid period. The method of data collection was bibliographic research and documentation. Documents were collected from the Cultural

Heritage in Tehran province and Varamin. A field method was used for collecting interviews and photographs of the building and its decorations. The decorations of the stucco of the research site were photographed by the authors. Among the decorations of the house-castle of Bani-Amiri and based on what can be identified over time, 74 motifs were classified on the northern, southern, and western fronts of this building. To answer the research question, of these 74 motifs, 24 motifs in the good physical condition and not ruined were selected as the sample for a closer and accurate evaluation.

Literature review

No comprehensive study has been carried out on the monuments and decorations which are at the risk of destruction in Varamin. The only available study is a master's thesis written by Bokan (2007). This thesis is titled reconstruction and restoration plan (Bani-Ameri's castle-like house) located in Hājjiyābād village of Varamin. In this thesis, Bani-Ameri's historic house has been examined using an architectural-pathological approach, and plan for its reconstruction has been designed and strategies for its revitalization as a tourist destination have been offered. The present study focuses on the stucco decorations and this is what differentiates this research from the study conducted by Bokan.

Theoretical Foundation

The term House in Dehkhoda dictionary is defined as a place in which one resides (Dehkhoda, 2012, 116). The basic need of the house has made traditional architects use their knowledge of human lifestyle and create a space whose features, structure type, materials, and ornamentation are compatible with the human spirit and body at any time. According to Dehkhoda, the word "decoration" has been defined as adorn and decoration (ibid., 274). According to this definition, the elements of decoration for a building or any work of art include the method of decoration,

patterns, and motifs. Apart from beautifying works and making them look resplendent, the elements are tailored to the spiritual needs of the residents. Makki Nejad (2009) describes two general views about decorations. One view deals with observable performance (material and form) of decoration. In this view, decorations are merely an observable cover devoid of any religious, ethnic, or cultural meaning. However, the other view is related to the semantic function of decoration and its content. From this point of view, the decoration is not an observable cover, but it has different levels including symbolic and transcendent meanings.

Stucco decoration in Iran

Gypsum is a mineral substance found in the form of stone in nature but exists in soluble form in seawater. It comes in different types based on the way of preparation and mixture with water. Due to its practical properties, it was the prime material of skeleton in the Sassanid era and its capabilities such as rapid moldability for shapes and curves, fire resistance, low cost, and colorability has turned it into a favorite material for the artists of this period to use it for the ornamentation of the walls of the rooms and facades (Motayefi Fard, 2012, 11-15). "Evidence related to architectural decorations shows that stuccoing has been extensively used in many of the pre-Islamic architectural works, especially in the Sassanid era. This art has been used alone or in combination with other arts" (Kiani, 1997, 112). This art is not unique to Iran, but it might have been originated from Iran (Hill & Graber, 1996, 103). According to Pope, "Iranians were in love with this ornamental style and they made this technique and style so delicate and varied that no other nation could have beaten them" (Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 88).

Stucco motifs

Studying the forms of decorations and themes of motifs of the Sassanid period and comparing them with those of the later periods is of great

importance. It is because such information can be used for restoring the origin of the Qajar artworks, recreating the Sassanid motifs. It also helps arrive at a conclusion based on the existing similarities. According to Kiani's (1997, 92-95) studies, scholars believe that the ornamental elements of this period can generally be divided into four categories.

- A) Plant motifs including branches, scalloped leaves, palm leaves, and reddish ornamentals or floral motifs such as (rosette);
- B) Animal and human motifs, mythological forms as well as the combination of all three (human, animal, geometric);
- C) Geometric motifs that include stylized designs (Iconography)¹;
- D) Inscriptions ...

As it is evident in their artworks, the Sasanians had a very naturalistic approach to architectural art. Their attention to nature and its elements seemed to be associated with naturalistic beliefs and religions dating back to pre-Zoroastrian times and until the Islamic era, such beliefs had been prevalent (Javadi, 2015, 33-39). Shirazi and Hormozi Nejad (2015) highlighted the importance of Sassanian paintings in the evolution of broken motifs. They maintained that creative artists altered the motifs of plants and nature and created simple components that could be extended through all architectural structures. According to Pope and Ackerman (2005), this feature makes the repetition of shapes along a line possible and reflects the main style of Sassanid artists

"Animal motifs have been the most important motifs in Iranian art, they have been depicted in the form of animals, mythical animals, or part of the animal's body. The first group, animals, portray the symbolic aspect of these animals and the second group portrays legendary creatures who have no longer normal and consisted animal with hybrid components" (Sadegh Pouri, 2016, 6-7) "In the Qajar period, stucco motifs were a combination of foreign and Persian designs, for instance, French harp and motifs with animal heads and Dave's face were

carved (Motayefi Fard, 2012, 40). In the art of the Islamic world, the prohibition of human and animal imagery increased the tendency of architects to use plant motifs and pictographs. Due to the diversity and multiplicity of these motifs, the aesthetic aspect of the decorations of the Islamic era reached its glorious peak. Soon, though the decoration became limited to religious sites, palaces and aristocratic houses got decorated with a variety of animal and human motifs and martial arts and hunting scenes. In the Safavid and Qajar periods, the geometric motifs of Sassanid stucco were imitated (Javadi, 2019).

Bani-Ameri's castle-like house

The historical city of Varamin was one of the most important areas in the Sassanid era” The cities built in the plains of Iran were the major centers of Sassanid civilization. As there were no stones in these places or there was no access to the stone, there was a preference for using stucco than stones in the decoration of buildings [...] Among the ruins of the city of Rey and Varamin, some stucco reliefs have been discovered and now they are in the museum of Pennsylvania in the US[...] In the Islamic era, Nain Jame Mosque, Ardestan Jame Mosque, Zawara Jame Mosque, the Mihrab of Isfahan Jame Mosque and the ruined Mosque of Varamin were reported as the most interesting examples of stucco in Iran” (Nafisi & Jorboze Dar, 2008, 240-242). Other examples of stucco works are Iraj Castle in the northeast of the city and a piece of decorative stucco wall in the Sassanid period.²

In Hājīyābād village of Varamin (Fig. 1), Bani-Ameri's 250-year-old castle-like house with a variety of decorations still has some traces of its past. “Hājīyābād village is one of the lowland plains located 25 kilometers of Varamin. Though this place is suitable for settlement thanks to its suitable natural resources, the constraints of water resource for agricultural development has imposed some restrictions on habitation (Bokan, 2007, 33). The old house of Bani-Ameri's castle-like house was built in a large area in the village based on the

same principle and it consists of both inner and outer parts. This castle-like house has been introduced as a landmark of Hājīyābād village in Varamin on google maps (Fig. 2).

In her study, Bokan has reported that the house is in the ownership of Gholam Hossein Bani Ameri, the grandson of Haji Mohammad-e- sultan Arab³, the son of Haji Kazem. She also has quoted from Ameri that the house is over 200 years old. This house was built by Haj Mohammad Sultan Arab. According to Bokan, after the death of Mohammad Sultan Arab, his sons started living in this house until the first Pahlavi era but after the Pahlavi era when the serfdom was abolished and Haj Kazim moved to

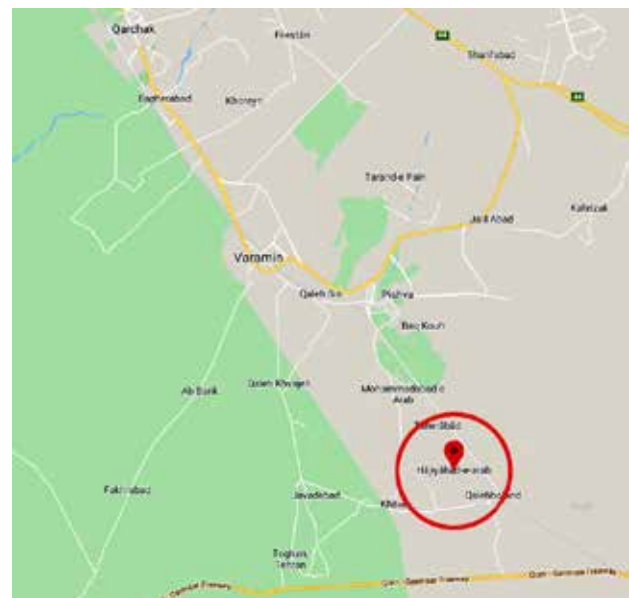


Fig. 1. Map of Hājīyābād village in Varamin. Source: www.google.com/maps/place/Hājīyābād-e-arab,+Tehran+Province.

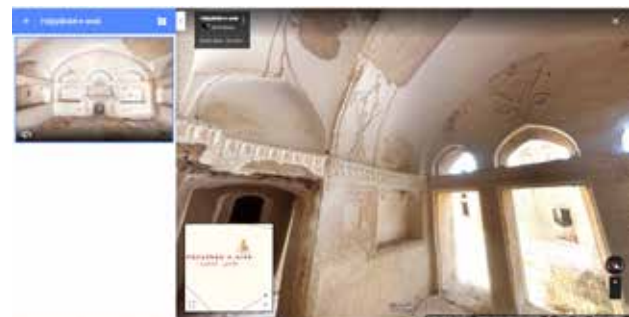


Fig. 2. The three-door room on the western side of Bani Ameri's house. Source: www.google.com/maps/place/Hājīyābād-e-arab,+Tehran+Province,+Iran.

the city of Varamin to lead a comfortable life and the house was run by his farmers. Soon the house lost its vividness. In 1971, the house was abandoned (Bokan, 2007, 64-73). During the researcher's visit to the house and interview with Gholam Hossein Bani Ameri, the owner of the house, introduced the various parts of the house, provided information on the historical background of the building, and confirmed the authenticity of the information reported by Bokan.

Introduction of different parts of Bani Ameri's castle-like house

Field evidence from the Hājiyābād village of Varamin shows that the architectural style of the Bani Ameri home and most of the buildings of the village belong to the Qajar period. This village is in the vicinity of the central desert and has a semi-arid climate, and its houses have four Ivans and a central courtyard. According to Pirnia (2017) the introvert style of architecture in warm and arid lands, in his term, a paradise in the heart of the desert has been one of the foundations of Iranian architecture. This style explains how architecture can stand against dry weather, annoying winds, flowing sand, and sunshine. This architectural style (houses with courtyards, four vaults) goes back to the pre-Islamic period (Nayebi, 2002, 55). This style has been aligned with the beliefs of the people of this country and reflects the value of privacy in life (ibid., 28-38). The type of materials used in this building has been associated with the wealth, social status of the house owner, and the climate of the village. The materials include clay, brick, thatch, gypsum, and wood. In the construction of the house available and vernacular materials have been used. Gypsum, brick, thatch, and decorative gypsum has been used in full projection or high relief and semi-projection or half relief. Except for the eastern side, the house has a single floor. Much of the second floor on the east side of the building has been demolished. The east and south looking facades of the house have been rebuilt with bricks

(Fig. 3). Because of the introversion style of the house, the rooms around the courtyard have been interconnected, and each room has a short, arched roof. Bani Ameri's house has only one entrance and three parts. Like a traditional house, to enter the room, an individual has to go through a square vestibule, a rectangular vestibule, a narrow hallway. On the four sides of the courtyard of Bani Ameri's house, there are four rooms. The four fronts and the location of the rooms on the four sides of the courtyard are designed to benefit from the sun and the climatic conditions of each depending on the season. The northern front is designed to be used in winter and the southern front is designed to be used in the summer and it is in the direction of Qiblah. South-facing rooms are called Orsi⁴ (Pirnia, 2017, 29) because their positions do not let them be much exposed to sunlight on summer days. The eastern front consists of two floors. The main entrances of the house, the vestibule, and the hallway are on the first floor, and the second floor, the remains prove that there has been a room there. According to the owner of the house, this room belonged to Amir Kabir, who used to visit the village from time to time to handle administrative and judicial affairs. The masters used to gather together for a meeting in this room. There was also an office downstairs at the entrance of the first floor. The room used to be allocated by the house owner for office work outside the home. According to



Fig. 3. Eastern View of Bani Ameri House from Outside. Source: Authors' archive.

observations and surveys, most of the decorations are in three-door rooms (for kings) on the west, north, and south sides of the house. The walls of the rooms are also decorated with shelves⁵ and mirror frames (Figs. 4 & 5). “There is a Husseiniyeh on the next to the house on its northern side. It was built at the same time the house was constructed. Husseiniyeh also has both brick and moaqali brick decorations. One room has been demolished, but the other one has remained (Bokan, 2007, 73).

Bani Ameri’s castle-like house decoration

In their research on Qajar historical houses and their decorative designs, Ghasemi Sichani and Memarian (2010) identified three categories of Qajar houses. The criteria for the differentiation of houses were their historical periods, their structures, and decorations. Comparing these features, they placed Bani Ameri castle-like house under the first category, coinciding with the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar. “In this category, houses are introverted, there is symmetry in the façade and the plan, courtyards are rectangular, and ceilings are arched (ibid., 2010, 91-92). Also, in the selection of motifs and the execution of decorations in the Qajar period, we can mention these cases: “ The importance of the component over the whole in single designs, the lack of attention to composition and harmony [...]. As if each part and piece has been created by one person and each artist has performed based on his taste and initiative in each part [...]. Excessive motifs and elements in a panel and eloquence of the work as a privilege [...] present a kind of ease in the execution of works and lack of commitment to geometric rules and in other words, the execution of most motifs and decorations is non-geometric (Goudarzi, 2009, 32). From the reviewed documents it can be concluded that the Bani Ameri’s house motifs can fall into four categories: plant, animal, human and geometric motifs and they include stylized designs. Observations of stucco motifs in the decorated rooms on the three fronts of the north, south, and west showed that 74 designs had a single

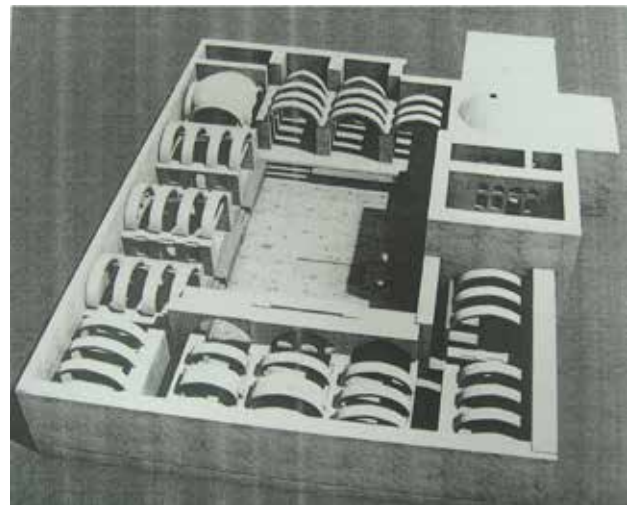


Fig. 4. Plan of the Bani Ameri’s House. Source: Bokan, 2007, 72.



Fig. 5. Ground Plan of Bani Ameri’s House. Source: Authors.

motif or were a combination of different motifs, and the designs with the combination of different motifs had more frequency. Some of the rooms in this house had no decorations, and the motifs of the second-floor room on the eastern front were unrecognizable due to extensive demolition. In general, the motifs of this house were designed to make the atmosphere of home much quieter and turn

it into a luxurious residence. However, the spiritual state of the motifs was insignificant. This could be related to the influence of the architectural style in the Qajar period. “The Qajar period coincided with aristocratic and lavish styles of Baroque and Rococo in Europe, which began during the reign of Fath Ali Shah Qajar, and the Qajar kings tended to hide their weakness and incompetency by showing off their properties and their glorious appearance (Zaboli Nejad, 2008,159). In addition to the decorations of the arched ceilings, the ledges, and wall shelves, stucco frames were mainly used for decoration of the walls. The walls of the room were divided into two or three parts by these decorative frames. Examining the remaining stucco showed that there was a mirror inside each frame. The stucco works inside the panels were a combination of human, animal, plant motifs and in the margin, there were recursive geometric motifs. This way of decoration was commonly used in Qajar buildings and this castle-like house. According to Makki Nezhad (2009), in the Qajar decorations, there are square and rectangular frames separated by empty spaces and within them a united system has been created by repetition, opposition, and symmetry of independent motifs (63). Technologically, the projection of the stucco reliefs of the Bani Ameri’s castle-like house is one to three centimeters.

Analysis of the motifs of Bani Ameri’s castle-like house

To answer the research question, 74 motifs from Bani-Ameri’s castle-like house were selected as the sample. As most of the samples had been destroyed by erosion, we only selected 24 complete and unbroken stuccowork samples and analyzed them in detail (see table 1). Each motif was examined from two perspectives. The motifs of Bani-Amiri’s house were photographed and matched with similar motifs in the art of the Sassanid period. The house-castle designs of Bani Amiri were examined in terms of composition, method of expansion, type of motif (see table 1). The components of the table

were organized based on the most prominent features of the Sassanid period motifs, which are the composition component representing the characteristic of the principle of symmetry and statics in the compositions of Sassanid lithographs, as well as the component of the method of expansion in a longitudinal and transverse range. Figure 6 compares the results of this statistical population.

The statistical results of matching the 24 stuccos of Bani Ameri’s castle-like house with the Sassanid

Table 1. Analysis of the motifs of Bani-Ameri’s castle-like house. Source: Authors.

Figures from Motifs of Bani-ameri castle-like house	Composition of Bani Ameri’s castle-like house											
	Type of motifs					Longitudinal and transverse modes of motifs expansion			Composition			
	Mixed	Human	Geometric	Animal	Plant	Quadrant	Half	Complete	Repetitive	Diagonal	Symmetrical	Horizontal
7-1							•			•	•	
8-1	•				•		•			•		•
9-1					•		•			•		•
10-1					•		•		•	•		
11-1					•		•			•		•
12-1	•	•		•	•		•	•		•		•
13-1	•		•	•	•		•	•		•		•
13-2	•		•	•	•		•			•		•
14-1	•		•	•	•		•			•		•
14-2	•		•		•		•			•		
14-3	•		•		•		•			•		•
15-1	•		•	•	•		•			•		•
16-1	•				•		•			•		
17-1	•	•	•		•		•	•	•	•		•
17-2	•		•		•		•	•	•	•		•
18-1	•				•		•			•		•
19-1	•				•		•	•		•		•
20-1	•				•		•	•		•		•
21-1	•		•		•		•	•		•		•
22-1			•				•	•		•		•
23-1	•			•	•	•				•		•
24-1					•		•	•		•		•
25-1	•		•	•	•		•			•		•
26-1	•		•	•	•		•	•		•		•

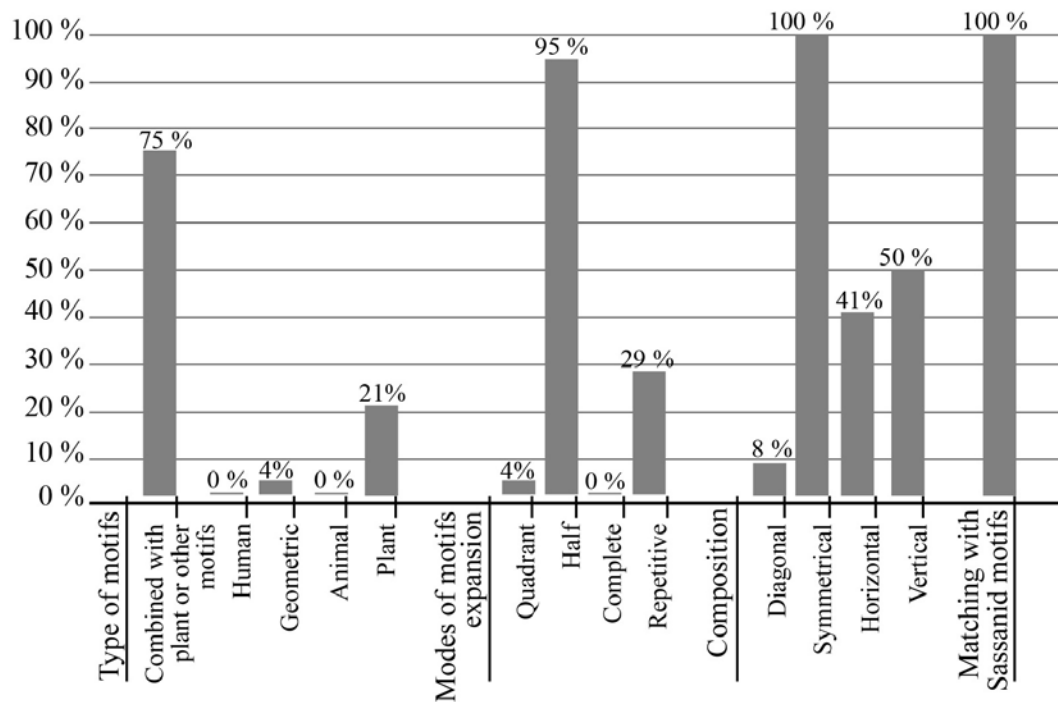


Fig. 6. Analysis of the motifs of Bani Ameri's castle-like house. Source: Authors.

motifs based on the indicators in table 1 illustrate the similarity of the stucco motifs of this Qajar building with the Sassanid motifs. In some cases, the similarity is limited to the shape and overall composition (Figs. 7 & 8) and The analysis shows that in some cases, the motifs are the same as the one in the Sassanid period. For example, this resemblance can be seen in figures 9, 10 and 11.

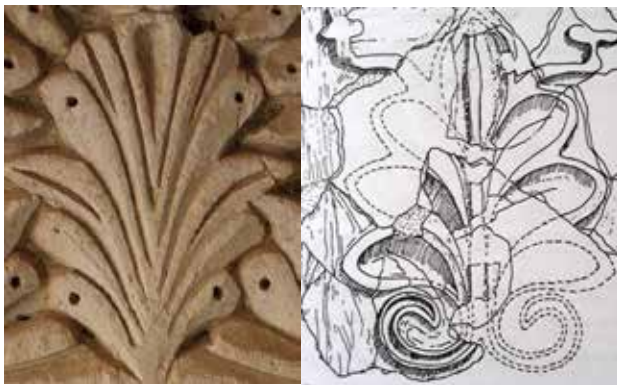
The degree of resemblance in the theme and content is also contemplative and reflects the great influence of the Sasanian motifs on the Bani Ameri castle-like house. As stated in the Sasanian motifs, there is a clear emphasis on order, clarity of design, and especially symmetry. In Bani-Ameri's castle-like-house, balancing the proportion of every motif and creating symmetry in all the compositions of the motifs (see the selected sample in table 1) has been the concern of the architect. In most of the designs, they are among the criteria used for matching these motifs to Sassanid motifs. Motifs come in pairs, figures 12, 13 and 14, portray an angel and a dragon in pairs on each side of the pot. It should be noted that in some images, parts of the castle-like house motifs share similarities with a group of Sassanid motifs. The similarities can be seen in figure 14.



Fig. 7. The motif in Bani Ameri's house corresponds with those of Sassanid stucco in terms of the shape and overall composition. Fig. 7-1. The motif of the stucco panel on the wall. Source: Authors. Fig. 7-2 & Fig. 7-3. The stucco motifs in the Sassanid period; Fig. 7-1 & Fig. 7-2. Kish palace. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005.



Fig. 8. The motif in Bani Ameri's house corresponds with those of Sassanid stucco in terms of the shape and overall composition. Fig. 8-1. The motif of the heater in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors. Fig. 8-2. Kish palace. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005.



9-1

9-2

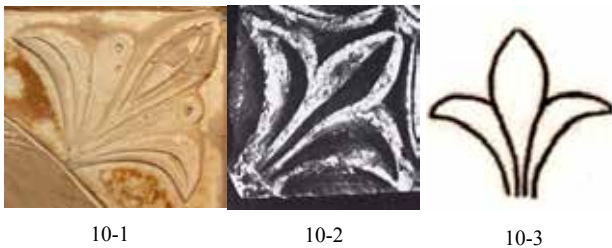


9-3

Fig. 9. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house exactly correspond with those of Sassanid stucco in terms of the shape.

Fig. 9-1. The marginal motif of the decorative stucco panel on the wall. Source: Authors.

Fig. 9-2 & Fig. 9-3. A palm in Takht-e Soleiman, and Ctesiphon areas. Source: Kröger, 2017.



10-1

10-2

10-3

Fig. 10. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house exactly correspond with those of Sassanid stucco in terms of the shape.

Fig. 10-1. The decorative marginal motif of the fireplace. Source: Authors.

Fig. 10- 2. Kish palace. Source: Girshman, 1991,188.

Fig. 10-3. A palm leaf. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005.

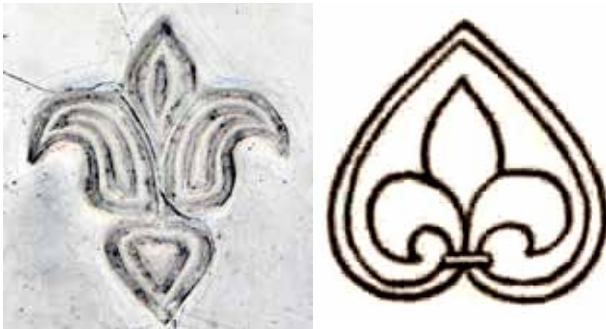
Among the features in Bani Ameri's house, we can refer to the abundance of plant motifs including leaves and flowers with the most diversity. These plants have been used alone or in combination with other motifs such as geometric, animal, and human (They are a symbolic combination of two different plant forms) (Figs. 15 & 16).

In the motifs of the Sassanid period, "much of its

ornamentation including plant and stylized paintings have been used for decoration of empty spaces (Kiani, 1997, 92-95). Many of the house plant motifs are Slimi. The Slimi motifs in Bani Ameri's house have something like a dragon's mouth at their end. The limited number of animal and human motifs in the interior decoration of the castle-like house can be related to the limitations of human motifs in the Sassanid era. The motifs include sculptured head, bust, and relief. "Except for bird figures, these motifs have received less attention in the Qajar period (Makki Nejad, 2009, 68-72). Also, 96% of the selected motifs in table 1 (21%) are used alone (75%) or in combination with other motifs. They were stylized and derived from nature. The diversity in the nature-inspired designs can be associated with the creativity of the designer. Despite this, most of the castle-like motifs are geometric. This means that two features of the Sassanid period, namely naturalism and geometric motifs in the castle-like house designs of Bani Ameri are prevalent. The analysis also shows a tendency of the architect in using the square or rectangular decorative frames with geometric patterns at the margins (examples of decorative frames in figure 17). They are found in the decoration of the walls of this castle-like house. The motifs are very similar to the decorative carvings of the Sassanid period in Kish, Ctesiphon, Kasra Ivan (Figure 17-3, examples of these frames in Ctesiphon).

In the decorations of the Sassanid period, recurrence is a principle. In a similar vein, Pope and Ackerman (2005) argue that "the use of decorative elements and the alteration of their relations, and the recurrence of shapes in a longitudinal direction, are the main parts of Sassanian artists." Also, in his article, following the principle of repetition and symmetry existing in Iranian design traditions, Nadim (2017), divided the extension style into four categories: complete motif (1/1) half motifs (1/2) quadrant motifs (1/4), and repetitive motifs. "Complete motifs refer to

motifs that have no axis of symmetry and the artist design it completely. In Quadrant motifs, two axes of symmetry are perpendicular to each other. In the repetitive motifs, one or more components are repeated side by side and form the whole motif.



11-1

11-2

Fig. 11. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house exactly correspond with those of Sassanid stucco in terms of the shape.

Fig. 11-1. The motif on the upper part of the wall in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.

Fig. 11-2. Kish palace. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005.



12-1



12-2

Fig. 12. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house exactly correspond with those of Sassanid stucco in terms of the symmetry, type of composition, content, and application.

Fig. 12-1. The motif on the upper part of the entrance for welcoming the guests in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.

Fig. 12-2. The stucco motifs in the Sassanid period; Anahita stucco, Taq-e- Bostan. Source: www.livius.org/pictures/iran/taq-e-bostan

The half motifs have only one axis of vertical symmetry. For designing, half of the work is done, and the other half is added using the mirroring technique. This way of designing motifs is rooted in the Sasanian imaging tradition. It became more popular in the Islamic period" (Nadim, 2007, 15).

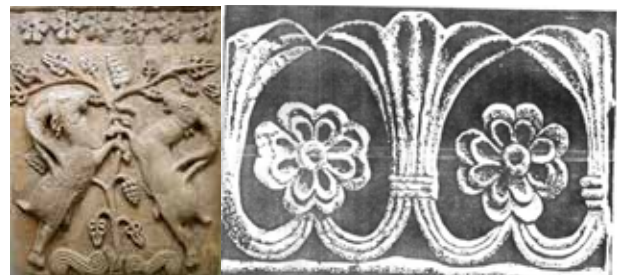
Figure 18-2 shows the semi-symmetrical method in the Sassanid period.

According to observations, contrary to the quadrant method which had the least frequency, half-motifs accounted for 95% of motifs (see table 1) in the castle-like house decorations. In figures 17, 19, 20, 21, 23 and 24, 29% of the



13-1

13-2

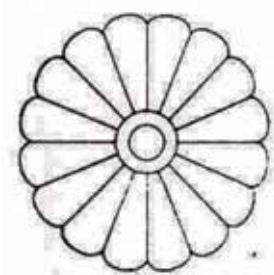


13-3

13-4



13-5



13-6

Fig. 13. Bani-Ameri house is similar to a group of Sassanid motifs in terms of shape, symmetry, and pairing, the content of the tree of life, and its guardians.

Fig. 13-1 & Fig. 13-2. The motifs on the upper part of the wall in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.

Fig. 13-3. Source: (www.wikimedia.org/iran_Sasanian_stucco)

Fig. 13-4. Palm leaves of Chal Tarkhan. Source: Mansouri, 2010, 292.

Fig. 13-5. Kish palace. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005.

Fig. 13-6. Lotus flower. Source: Mansouri, 2010, 258.



14-1



14-2

14-3



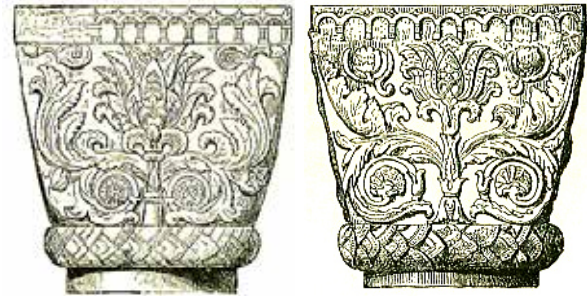
14-4

Fig. 14. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house share similarities with a group of Sassanid motifs in terms of the shape. Fig. 14-1, Fig. 14-2 & Fig. 14-3. The motifs on the upper part of the wall in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors. Fig. 14-4. The stucco of Kish palace, Ctesiphon. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005, 770-776.

castle-like house motifs are inspired by plants and nature and are transformed into simple and expandable components standing individually but recurrently along a line symmetrically and in a continuous form. Similar examples in the Sassanid period are shown in figures 8-2, 9-3, 13-4, 19-2, and 3, 20-2, 21-2, 22-1, and 23-2. Creatures such as Simorgh, dragons, snakes, and angels



15-1



15-2



15-3

Fig. 15. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid stucco in terms of the frequency of plants, overall composition. Fig. 15-1. The motifs on the upper part of the fireplace in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.

Fig. 15-2. Source: www.gutenberg.org

Fig. 15-3. Source: www.livius.org/pictures/iran/taq-e-bostan

are paired and symmetrically carved to guard as a combination of different leaves and flowers symbolizing the tree of life. In figure 12 two angels are obliquely standing in the king's room on either side of a vase in a symmetrical form. The shapes of their body shape and the type of flower holding were similar to the Sassanid angels on the intel of Taq-e Bostan. But, as can be seen in figure 12-1, instead of the ring, each of the angels in Bani Ameri's house is holding a bouquet. This might show they are welcoming guests. "The faces of these angels are similar to the Qajar figures which are featured with a round face, with almond eyes with archery eyebrows, thin nose, a small mouth, protruding cheeks and the existing similarity in drawing male and female faces, to one another is observed" (Ebrahimi Naghani, 2007, 86).



16-1



16-2

16-3

Fig. 16. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid stucco in terms of the frequency of plants, overall composition. Fig. 16-1. The motifs on the upper part of the fireplace in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.

Fig. 16-2. The stucco motifs in the Sassanid period. Source: www.byzanz-mainz.de.

Fig. 16-3. Kish palace. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005, 776.



17-1

17-2



17-3

Fig. 17. The motifs in Bani Ameri's castle-like house exactly correspond with groups of Sassanid motifs in terms of shape, composition, and decorative frames.

Fig. 17-1 & Fig. 17-2, The motifs of the stucco frame on the wall in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.

Fig. 17-3. The stucco motifs in the Sassanid period; Ctesiphon area, Damghan, Iran. Source: Kröger 2017,106.

Figure 25 shows the abstract shape of plants or paisley in the castle-like house. The composition and symmetry of birds are similar to the life tree in the Sassanid era⁶ (see figure 25- 2 and 25-3). In figures 13-1 and 14-2, guards in form of snakes and dragons are paired on either side of the ornamental plant motifs. Also depicted in figure 26-1, they are birds like peacock, which share a lot of commonalities with the guards of the life tree in figure 26-2.

Results and Discussion

Out of 74 motifs extracted from Bani-Ameri's castle-like house, a total of 24 stuccowork samples were selected and analyzed in detail (see table 1). The stucco motifs of Bani Ameri's castle-like house showed a lot of similarities with the motifs in the Sassanid period in terms of the composition, the extension modes of motifs, motifs types. As can be seen in figure 6, in 100% of the motifs in the castle-like house, creating symmetry was the



18-1



18-2

Fig. 18. The motif in Bani Ameri's house corresponds with that of Sassanid stucco semi-symmetrically

Fig. 18-1. The decorative marginal motif of the fireplace in Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.

Fig. 18-2. The stucco motifs in the Sassanid period; Taq-e Bostan. Source: Girshman, 1991, 228.



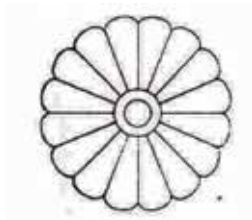
19-1



19-2



19-3



19-4

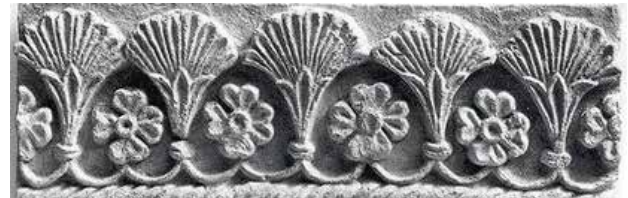
Fig. 19. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid in terms of composition, mode of expansion, and repetition.
 Fig. 19-1. The marginal motif of the stucco frame on the wall of Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.
 Fig. 19-2. Kish palace. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005.
 Fig. 19-3. Ctesiphon area. Source: Kröger, 2017, 143.
 Fig. 19-4. The motif of the lotus flower in Taq-e-Bostan. Source: Mansouri, 2010, 258.

main architectural principles. As can be seen in table 1, in the extension modes, 95% of the half motifs have been recurrently created by the axis of symmetry.

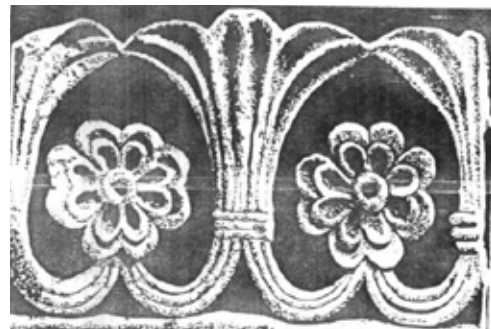
In addition, the evidence and reasons for not using the human motifs in earlier periods seem to have influenced the motifs in Varamin and have increased the tendency of the architect for using



20-1



20-2



20-3

Fig. 20. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid in terms of composition, mode of expansion, and repetition.
 Fig. 20-1. The marginal motif of the stucco frame on the wall of Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.
 Fig. 20-2. Ctesiphon area in the Sixth Century. Source: www.metmuseum.org
 Fig. 20-3. Chal Tarkhan. Source: Mansouri, 2010.



21-1



21-2

Fig. 21. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid in terms of composition, mode of expansion, and repetition.
 Fig. 21-1. The marginal motif of the stucco frame on the wall of Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.
 Fig. 21-2. The pomegranate motif of Kish period. Source: Godard, 1991, 72.

plant motifs. This proves the influence of Sassanid motifs on the motif of this house. Also, comparing the themes of house-castle motifs with those of the Sassanid motifs show that six motifs depicting flowerpot in different shapes with dragon, peacock, and angel guards and their concepts are very similar to the tree of life in the pre-Islamic period in Iran, especially the Sassanid period.



22-1



22-1

Fig. 22. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid in terms of composition, mode of expansion, and repetition.
Fig. 22-1. Show the marginal motif of the stucco frame on the wall of Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.
Fig. 22-2. Molding on a Silver vase, Armitage Museum. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005, 921.



23-1



23-2

Fig. 23. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid in terms of composition, mode of expansion, and repetition.
Fig. 23-1. The marginal motif of the stucco frame on the wall of Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.
Fig. 23-2. Stucco panel of Sassanid period in Hajiabad region of Bishabour. Source: Mansouri, 2010.

Conclusion

Bani Ameri's castle-like house is a 200- year-old monument which is recorded as a historical place of Varamin and in the village of Hājiyābād. This monument is at the risk of erosion and destruction. It is decorated with different stucco work and has Iranian-Islamic architectural patterns (four vaults and inner- courtyard). As this castle like-house



24-1

24-2

Fig. 24. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid in terms of composition, mode of expansion, and repetition.
Fig. 24-1. The marginal motif of the stucco frame on the wall of Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.
Fig. 24-2. Stucco panel of Sassanid period in Hajiabad region of Bishabour. Source: Mansouri, 2010.



25-1

25-2

25-3

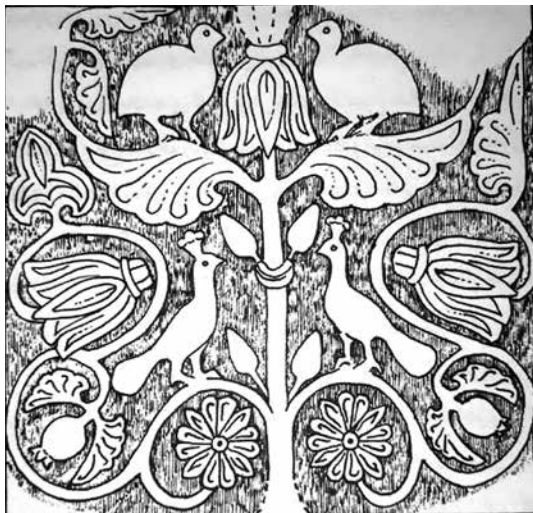
Fig. 25. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid in terms of shape, life tree, and overall composition.
Fig. 25-1. The Santourian motif in the outdoor the room of Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.
Fig. 25-2. The stucco motifs in the Sassanid period; Kish palace. Source: Pope & Ackerman, 2005, 756.
Fig. 25-3. The Cypress stucco. Source: Hertsfeld, 2002, 27.

belongs to the Qajar period, it has the decorative features of this period. Because the motifs have fundamental values in their nature, the stucco of Bani Ameri's castle-like house reflects the carvings of the Sassanid period. The results also indicate the significant similarities between the decorations of the Sassanid period with the Qajar period. These common themes prove that ancient methods have been adopted and the stuccowork has been influenced by Sassanid art on plaster

Acknowledgment: We sincerely thank the family of Bani Ameri, especially Mr. Hamid Bani Ameri (house owner) who did not hesitate to collaborate with us in all stages of this study.



26-1



26-2

Fig. 26. The motifs in Bani Ameri's house correspond with those of Sassanid in terms of shape, life tree, and overall composition.

Fig. 26-1. The Santourian motif in the outdoor the room of Bani Ameri's house. Source: Authors.

Fig. 26-2. Ctesiphon palace. Source: Khazaei, 2007, 25.

Endnotes

1. The representation of the basic and distinctive features of natural things is based on a contract and this is opposed to naturalization. In this type of representation, simplification, regular repetition, mirroring, proportion modification, and formal exaggeration are commonly used. The most prominent examples of iconography can be found in Neolithic pottery and Byzantine mosaics (Pakbaz, 1999, 276).
2. In the Jane Dieulafoy's travelogue is written that on June 15, she visited the castle and claimed that the Iraj castle was a Sassanian monument (Tajik & Atri, 2005, 31).
3. According to the owner of the house, Arab Ameri's tribe immigrated to Iran due to the weather and climate of Saudi Arabia and settled beside the salt desert where they had access to pastures. The Ameri tribe moved to Kerman and Khorasan in small groups and a group of them to Semnan through the Kashan desert and maintained their centrality for a long time. Mohammed Sultan Arab, the great of Bani Ameri clan, was born in Kazemain in Iraq and came to Varamin and took over ownership of Hājīyābād Village and started building houses in the time of Fath Ali Shah Qajar (Authors' interview).
4. Orsi in Persian means open or widely open (Pirnia, 2017, 28).
5. Ledges craved up the wall are less commonly used for household items (Pirnia, 2017, 28).
6. In the decorations of the Sassanid period, various plant motifs symbolize the tree of life and its guardians in the pre-Islamic period (Sarfraz, Javadi & Alian, 2012).

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Partov, Z. & Masoudi Amin, Z. (2020). An investigation of the reflection of Sasanian motifs in the stucco decoration of Bani Ameri's castle-like house. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 17(89), 21-36.

DOI: 10.22034/BAGH.2020.201344.4302

URL: http://www.bagh-sj.com/article_113209_en.html

