



## A Comparative Study of Pre-Islamic Paintings and Their Manifestations in the Islamic Period (with an Emphasis on the Plant Decorations of Qalaichi Hill and the Jameh Mosque of Urmia)

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Throughout history, humans have expressed their identity and cultural values through art and architecture. Decorative motifs, particularly plant-based designs, have played a crucial role in shaping architectural aesthetics and symbolizing spiritual, social, and environmental meanings. The evolution of these motifs has been influenced by cultural beliefs, artistic creativity, and the ambitions of rulers. Iranian architecture, both before and after the advent of Islam, reflects a continuous integration of natural elements into design. This research conducts a comparative study of pre-Islamic plant motifs from the Mannaean, Achaemenid, and Sassanian periods and their manifestations in Islamic-era architecture, with a focus on the Jameh Mosque of Urmia. The study highlights the role of plant motifs as a bridge between past and present architectural traditions and emphasizes their cultural significance in Iranian design.

**Methodology:** This study employs a qualitative research approach, combining library-based and field research. A descriptive-analytical method is used to compare plant motifs across different historical periods. The research systematically examines plant-based decorative patterns in Mannaean architecture and traces their continuity and transformation through the Achaemenid, Sassanian, and Islamic periods. Case studies include the Qalaichi Hill site, where Mannaean decorative motifs have been identified, and the Jameh Mosque of Urmia, where Islamic-era plant motifs are prevalent. The study applies a comparative framework to analyze the stylistic evolution, symbolic meanings, and functional aspects of these motifs, providing insights into their enduring role in Iranian architectural heritage.

**Results:** The findings reveal that plant motifs from the pre-Islamic Mannaean period persisted in later decorative arts, both before and after the introduction of Islam. Mannaean designs, characterized by geometric lines and organic plant forms, influenced subsequent architectural styles. The transition from Mannaean to Achaemenid and Sassanian motifs showcases an increasing complexity in design, with later periods incorporating more intricate floral and geometric patterns. During the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods, plant motifs became more elaborate, reflecting advancements in artistic techniques and cultural exchanges. The study identifies key motifs such as lotus flowers, cypress trees, pomegranates, vine leaves, and geometric floral patterns. These motifs, initially seen in pre-Islamic art, were adapted and integrated into Islamic architectural ornamentation. The research underscores the enduring significance of plant motifs and their evolution in response to changing aesthetic and cultural influences.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that plant motifs have played a continuous and transformative role in Iranian architectural decoration. While specific designs evolved over time, the fundamental symbolism of nature remained intact across different historical periods. The Jameh Mosque of Urmia serves as an example of how Islamic-era architecture absorbed and reinterpreted earlier motifs while preserving their spiritual and artistic significance. The findings highlight the importance of plant motifs in bridging historical and contemporary architectural traditions, emphasizing their cultural continuity. Future research could further explore the integration of these motifs into modern architectural practices, focusing on their potential for contemporary sustainable design.

**Key words:** Ancient Iran, Jameh Mosque of Urmia, Mannaean Civilization, Plant Motifs