Fish imagery in Iranian artwork

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Abstract: Iranian art is one of the richest artistic heritages in the world comprising different fields such as architecture, paintings, weaving, pottery, calligraphy, metalworking, petrography, etc. This art had inseparable link with nature; especially with plants and animals in different eras; and it has been interwoven with poetry and literature so that its glory, beauty and expression have increased over time. In this study, based on available resources and collections in the museums of the world, fish imagery depicted in ancient Iranian art has been studied and its importance is discussed from different perspectives. The use of plant and animal imagery, especially fish, in the ancient works such as stone, clay, bronze and fabric (textile) has a long history of several thousand years and the fish has been used as a symbol of religion, culture, social relationships and economy. On the other hand, fish imagery presents the past fish fauna, and along with the archaeological remains, provides information about the fish biodiversity, which is usually consistent with the recent ichthyodiversity.

Keywords: Fish imagery, Archaeology, Ichthyodiversity, Iranian artwork.

Introduction
Fishes constitute slightly more than one-half of the total number of recognized living vertebrate species including amphibians, reptilians, birds and mammals (Nelson 2006). Fishes exhibit enormous diversity in their morphology, in the habitats they occupy, and in their biology (Nelson 2006). This situation is also observed in marine, brackish and freshwater fishes of Iran. This diversity has helped human beings to use fish as symbols in religious, cultural, artistic, social, economical and political practices. Surveys show that numerous fishermen offered some of their catch to temples, sacrificed them for Gods or abstained from consuming them on particular days. This all shows to what extent fishes had an integral role in ceremonies and rituals in the past. Archaeological findings have uncovered fish as a fairly constant motif with which fishes various taxonomies are revealed.

Fish have been the subject of works of art for a long time in many cultures (Moyle & Moyle 1991). Salmon, Trout (Salmonidae) and Pike (Esocidae) were painted or sculptured by CroMagnon people in Caves in France at least 14000 years ago (Ruspoli 1986). The ancient Egyptians depicted many species of Nile River fishes on the walls of their tombs (Klingender 1971). Fish designs in ancient Egypt were common and showed little alteration for 1500 years (Moyle & Moyle 1991). In addition, common carp, Cyprinus carpio were frequently the subjects of paintings by the ancient Chinese. Fishing scenes are found on the decorative pottery of the Hellenic Greeks, and many Mediterranean fish species can be identified on Roman murals and mosaics (Klingender 1971).

Ancient Persians believed in sanctity of four elements: water, wind, earth, and fire. They also believed that fish is the symbol of water and is connected with the Anahita, the Goddess of water. According to these beliefs, water and fish are symbols of life, fertility and blessing. Fish designs in ancient Persia also showed the important role of them in rituals and religious ceremonies, decoration,
nutrition, fishery and a good way for recognizing different species of fish throughout time. Remains of paleontology discovered that some fish spices lived in the rivers in Mesopotamia as old as the third millennium B.C.

The aim of this study is to show how fish has been used in Persian art as religious, cultural symbols and biodiversity and to determine Iranian fish fauna by using fish imagery in the Iranian artwork through the time.

Materials and Methods
This work has been compiled from the works listed in the references and also by examination of available fish imagery in the museums and collections around the world including Iranian National Museum, British Museum, Louver Museum, Hermitage Museum, Washington Museum, New York Museum, and Ashmolean Museum.

Results and Discussion
The study of the design of fishes on the objects in the world museums and collections around the world, and bone remains and palentoes indicate that this kind of motif were common for centuries in Iran (Fig. 1). In addition, it shows that they have been used as symbols for religious, cultural, artistic, decorative and economic purposes. Moreover, they could recognize some Iranian fish fauna in this time and bridge the gap between fishes in the past and present.

Based on the available data it seems that Sumerians were the first world civilization that settled in the south of Tigris and Euphrates rivers around 5000 or 4000 B.C. They used fish as the title of (label of) Sun God. Sunrise in Sumer called “Sukha” and in some cases was used by “na” suffix. The literal translation of that was “man–flying fish” (Fig. 2). In the past, people believed that, the sun downed in the water in the sunset and rose in the next day again. Therefore, they used the pictures of sun and fish together. In Sumerian culture, fish is the symbol of Ea. In Sami, language (Akkadian and Babylonian culture) Ea is the God of water and in Sumerian language Enki is the other name for Ea. It was the symbol of underwater and the death world, the third great God in the council of Mesopotamia, the God of wisdom and witchcraft, illustrated and carved in some amulets (Cooper 2000).

Elamite (5000-647 B.C.) had a new connection with the Ur holy city in the Sumer civilization and they believed in Ea and worshiped him as a God of water and wisdom. There are numerous sample of
this relation in the seals and reliefs, and some illustrated legendary designs like half deer-half fish, half human-half fish that are mostly representative of semi-God creatures (Majidzadeh 2000).

Holy burial ritual in Elamite civilization was inspired by Ea ceremonies, the God of water and wisdom, in Sumer. The existence of such rituals was revealed by some stone bath and containers found in Susa. One of them is decorated with the motifs of goat-fish and fold rope as a symbol of water flows (Figs. 3, 4) (Majidzadeh 2000).

A silver ritual bowl belonging to the six century B.C is decorated with the Goddess of fish (Figs. 5, 6). The Goddess is wearing clothes with furbelows and a necklace. She is bringing forward her palm (perhaps for showing a special kind of religious ceremony) (Majidzadeh 1991). It seems that the metalworker tried to create a new female character of man–fish in order to create a new myth. This type of motif, seen abundantly in Mesopotamian art is because this Goddess is the relative of the other tiny Goddesses that have the semi body like waves and embodied the territory of the earth and vortex (Amiet 1993).

The Goddess of Anahita is the protector of water in ancient Persian myth, so water and fish are the symbol of Anahita (Kambakhshfard 1991). Anahita is the Goddess of all water in the world and the source of oceans in the cosmos. There are several similarities between the Goddess of Anahita and the God of Ea which shows how the two have the same root i.e. the roots of two myths are same (Eliade 1993). We presume that the motif of this bowl is the Goddess of Anahita too.

The designs of fish are copious in the ancient of Persian myth and religion. For instance in Iranian myth Jamshid, pristine king at the dawn of human being, strived to nurture fish. The place for growing of fish called Mahikhaneh in Iran.

**Bepardakht abe miyane gah khak beparvard mahi dar on abe pak Ze Jamshid manad chonin**
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*yadegar argarche bar amad basi rozegar* (Ferdowsi 2013) (Putting and purring water in the hole of earth and growing fish in that pure water. It is the heritage of Jamshid even though a lot of time has passed from that time).

The followers in Mithraism religion (the God of sun in ancient Persia) believed Mitra was born in water and then two dolphins delivered her from water. In addition, Zoroaster had seven preaching in seven parts of his holy book. In one of them, he talked to five creatures; fish, white sable, phonix, rabbit and goat. In Zoroastrianism, all of these animals are the symbols of this world. The fish of Arzuh is the chief of all fifth animals and has the most important mission among them.

The mythical sea of Farakhkart in Avesta is described as the center of gathering water, which covers one third of the earth. It is stated in the myth of “fish and wonderful tree”: Ma was the root of all trees growing in the Farakhkart. In Avesta, the name of this kind of tree is Seyeen, the cure for all pains, or wonderful tree (Derakhte Hame Tokhmeh) (Fig. 7). The nest of phonix was on this first mythical tree.

This special tree was in the middle of Farakhkart Sea and an especial fish known Kara swam around the tree and protected it from all harmful creatures. One of especially dangerous creature was a frog that tried to chew the root of this holy tree (Curtis 1999).

In addition, we read in the myth of “fish and Hom plant”. Hom is a God in the spiritual world. It is curative and is the chief of all plant. A special kind of Hom called white Hom is respected in holy ceremonies. The other name in ancient Iranian myth for Hom is Gayvkrna. It is a mythical plant that grows in the deepest point of Farakhkart Sea, and is the source of eternity and reconstruction of the world. Demon created a toad in the Farakhkart Sea in order to destroy white Hom. In opposition, Oormazd created two holy fishes to protect the white Hom (Amouzgar 2001).

**Fish and petroglyphs (Rock art):** Archeologists were able to recognize the motifs of fish on different things and materials in various eras. Tiny and miniature pictures of fishes created by pecking or beating on the rocks with hard strong tools with shallow reliefs were found on the Petroglyphs Tymrh (Rock art in some places of Qom and Markazi Provinces) (Fig. 8), (Rafifar 2003). The most problematic aspect of the rock art is its almost impossibility to determine the exact time of their creation. We can only estimate a relative time by using comparative chronology (Beik Mohammadi 2012).

**Fish and pottery designs:** Fish designs are the most
prevalent motifs on the potteries in prehistory of Iran (Figs. 10-13). However, this kind of design can be seen on other materials like stone, metal, textiles as well. Initially artists were eager to duplicate reality but gradually they started to work in a sampler method. One example is a fish design with simple spindle-shape formed on the potteries.

Tall-iBakun is a hill in southwest of Persepolis in Marvdasht, in Fars Province. The history of hill goes back to the fourth millennium B.C. (Vandenberg 1995). Fish in the oval form with vertical lines around it are in some pieces of potteries in Tall-iBakun. In addition, there are four fins connected with the body of fish and at the end of its body, there is an appendix instead of a tail (Fig. 9).

Tal-e Shoqa is another place in Fars Province that fish designs on the potteries were found. Discovered potteries belong to the civilization of this area of Iran. They are not fragile and incomplete firing.

The shapes of most potteries in Tal-e Shoqa were inspired by animals and plants; and attempts were made to depict them in their natural state (Vandenberg 1995). An example is a rython with a hen shape designed with a fish motif (Fig. 12). They are two rows of geometric forms with cross verticals lines that make square shape in the upper part of the pottery.

The form of fish is very simple. Cross lines are representative of fish scales; tail and fin of fish were drawn with similar lines and resembles forks or two branches. This kind of fin is common in the marine fish body. Contrary to this, the whole pictures were
associated with a dolphin. Also the direction of movement and the curve form of their body show them jumping out of water.

In Figure 13, there is a pottery bowl from Shahr-e Sūkhté located in Sistan-Baluchistan Province. In this bowl, two fishes are in the center and some small fishes with little details are moving around them.

**Fig.12.** Rython, third Millennium B.C., Tal-e Shoqa, Fars.

**Fig.13.** Pottery with fish design, Shahr-e Sūkhté, third millennium, Iranian National Museum, Tehran.

**Fig.14.** Bronze bowl with fish design, third Millennium, Shahdad, Kerman, Iranian National Museum, Tehran.

of bronze. For example, in bronze bowl from Shahdad civilization in Kerman (Fig. 14), there are nine reliefs fishes, with five of them larger than the others, and all of them are turning around in circle (Curtis 1999).

Jiroft is a city in south east of Kerman Province. This civilization belonged to third millennium B.C., and is located close to Halil River with some Archaeological sites and cemeteries. Many discovered pieces in this territory are made of Chlorite stone (Fig. 15). Most of the motifs on them are rarely seen animals and fish design (Biglari 2014).

The bronze of Lorestan includes axe, pieces belong to horse, mirror, pin, statute, etc (Figs. 16, 17). Most of them carry motifs of different kind of animals like fish. Researchers believe that these subjects with their motifs had ritual elements.

On the head of an axe discovered in Lorestan second millennium B.C., there is a man with a hat keeping a fish in his arm. Godard (1998) believed this fish is the symbol of Ea God in Mesopotamia.

In ancient Lorestan territory, some rythons were discovered. Rython is a Latin name for Takok in Persian, Armenia and Georgia languages. Rythons
were made in animal forms and had vessels and mouth in ancient time. They were used in ritual ceremonies and courts and were treated as luxury subjects (Fig. 18).

**Fish and Elamite Civilization:** The history of Elamite goes back to the eighth millennium B.C. From third millennium B.C Elamite civilization enters historic time (Haririan 1998). Elamite was one of the oldest and first civilizations in the world that governed in Khuzestan, Fars, Kurdistan, Ilam and some parts of other provinces like Bushehr, Kerman, Lorestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Kermanshah, and in some centuries expanded to Urmia River.

Based on historical categories, this civilization is divided in three phases: Old, middle and new Elamite. Some paintings on the potteries from Susa (main capital of Elamite Empire) belonging to 3500 B.C. include advanced geometrical designs and new form of humans and animal shapes. In Elamite art,
animals were not only the symbol of natural power and blessing but also illusion. These kinds of motifs were more respected than others (Amiet 1993).

From the beginning of forth millennium B.C., living animals like fish can be seen abundantly on the Elamite art, especially pottery (Figs. 11, 19-22). Sometimes the motif of fish could be observed with other natural elements; such as water, birds, trees and etc; at times with different God and Goddess; and eventually they are seen alone (Amiet 1993).

Untash-Napirisha stone slate is made of black stone in middle Elamite on 2700 B.C. (Figs. 23, 24). There are four rows, each having different motifs with different subjects on this slate. At the first glance, it seems there is no relationship between the subjects. In the upper row, the king stands in front of Inšušinak (the God of preservative city of Susa). In the second row, Untash-Napirisha is with his mother and wife. Finally, in the lower rows, there are some mythical creatures those are in pairs.

A pair of fish-fairy is on a mosaic context. This context is the symbol of water in the sky and earth. Water is like ropes that are flushing from three pair of bowls (Amiet 1993). Both fish–fairy on this slate are the symbol of Gods water. There might be a relationship between this kind of motif and Ea God that came to Elamite art under the influences of Mesopotamian culture. Elamite believed that some of fishes are fairy that reign under water (Assadi Khoramabadi 1979).

The motifs on some slate pertaining to Elamite are believed to be Gods and Goddess, and some of them depict daily life like the relief of a spinner woman in natural pitch slate. The woman has a spindle in her hand (Fig. 25) sitting on the luxury chair. A servant with a fan is standing behind her. There is a fish and some fruits in front of the woman on the table (Majidzadeh 2000). In this relief, artisan or artisans tried to show all the details in all motifs especially in the fish form (Amiet 1993).

Silver fish statue, 7.1cm length, 2.5cm high, made by the casting technique and ductile method (Figs. 26, 27).
National Museum. Lorestan artist used this kind of design for decoration hilt in Kalmakarra region by the influence of Assyria and Scythians.

Assyria, Scythians and Median artists made bowie knife hilt with decorative motifs and designs. These axes and hilts were used for killing enemies in real life. Also this bowie knife used in the life after

Fig. 22. Bird eating a fish, 2000-1940 B.C, Susa, Louver Museum, Paris.

Fig. 23. Stone slate of Untash-Napirisha, middle Elamite, (1340-1300 B.C.), Louver, Paris.

Fig. 24. The detail of stone slate of Untash-Napirisha.

Fig. 25. Elamite woman and her servant, 800-700 B.C. Louver, Paris.

Fig. 26. Silver fish statue, new Elamite, 900-600 B.C. Barakat Gallery, London.
death to protect the soul of corpse in next hazardous and mysterious life to supported soul ahead of fiend powers. These kinds of tools were mostly used in ritual and ceremonies. For blessing, these axes and hilts were usually carved motif of Gods and Goddess. It empowered them with spiritual energies. Motifs of Gods and Goddess and mythical animals increased the secrecy of axes and hilts (Fanian 1975).

Fish in Achaemenid and Sassanid eras: In Pasargadæ and Mesopotamia regions, all men wore fish shape clothes. In one of reliefs in a palace in Pasargadæ, 600 B.C., a priest of Ea God, bairn (or child) of Marduk, great God in Mesopotamia, is wearing a piece of clothes with sever-al cuts and fish decoration. This kind of clothing was common for priests in this religion in the first Millennium B.C. (Figs. 30, 31) (Godard 1998).

Golden red fish statuette is one of the Oxus Treasure things unearthed about 1877 and 1880 from Takht-e Kavādh archeological site. Takht-e Kavādh is a ruined monument, extending about one square Km, as one of two important forts in northern beach of Amu Darya. Oxus Treasure belongs to Achaemenian Era (500-400 B.C.) and has more than 170 precious objects which are currently kept in the British, Victoria and Albert Museums.

Red fish statuette with 24.2cm and 370g weight was made of gold. Scales and fins are drawn with many details (Fig. 32). There is a hole in its mouth and a tube or channel on it. It might have been used for keeping perfume or oil. This tube might also have been kept by a lead and used as a decorative necklace. This statue is kept in the British Museum and was once on display in an exhibition called Nowruz and Haft-seen in 2004.

Fishing was very important in Achaemenian Era.
By Greece historian’s records, different types of fishes hatched from Persian Gulf and Tigris River and transported as sun-dried, salted, and pickled to other places ((Biglari 2014).

The design of dolphin was very common in Greek and Etruscan art. Many researchers discovered a species of dolphin, *Phocoena phocoena* (Linnaeus, 1758) with upper black and lower white skin living about 4000 B.C in the Mediterranean Sea.

In some Greek mythical stories like Apollo, the God of sun needed two different existence in air and water, so it was necessary for sun to have a dolphin double life in order to come out in new day when it went to water last night (Mokhtarian 2011). Greek culture, civilization, and their vogue like dolphin design prevailed after Alexander the great captured Achaemenian region in Seleucid Empire (Fig. 33).

The other kinds of fish design can be seen on Sassanid metal bowls. Based on beliefs and myths in the Zoroastrianism, one or two fishes are the symbol of life in the water and they were to protect roots of the life tree (Figs. 34-38).

**Fish and Islamic Er:** Fish was used excessively in Islamic Hadiths and Revayats. Many commenta-tors of the holy Quran like Abu l-Futuh al-Razi and ibn Abbas believed that the aim of “ٌ” (N) letter at the beginning of Qalam Surah, is fish that the earth put the back of it (Razi 1997). Also by the 142-144 verses of Safat Surah in the holy Quran, a big fish swallowed the prophet Jonah and then he worshiped the God. Therefore, the God rescued him (Fig. 39). Saadi Shirazi composed a poem for this story: *Ghorse mah dar tabahi shod younes andar dahane mahi shod* (Saadi 2011) (A black hole covered the sun and Joahn prophet went in the mouth of fish).

In 13th century, fish design was very common on glazed golden potteries and tiny glazed golden tiles resembling stars. The themes of the paintings on these potteries were inspired by Ferdowsi and Nizami’s books (Figs. 40, 41). The motifs of fish were used on Bowls (Figs. 42-48), Kilim (Figs. 49, 50), Cloth (Figs. 51 - 53), Porcelain (Fig. 54) Carpet (Figs. 55, 56), and Coin (Fig. 57).
Fig. 36. Silver bowls with fish design, Sassanid era, Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

Fig. 37. Silver bowl gilt with human, bird and fish designs, Sassanid era, shea, Gillan, Iranian National Museum, Tehran.

Fig. 38. The detail of Silver bowl gilt, bird and fish designs.

Fig. 39. The history of Jonah prophet and fish, Jami’ al-tawarikh, Rashid-al-Din Hamadani, 13th century, Coad et al. (2000).

Fig. 40. Glaze golden bowl, 13th century, made in Kashan, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Fig. 41. Shirin swam in the water, 13th century, made in Kashan, Freer Gallery, Washington.
Fig. 42. Glaze golden bowl, 13th century, made in Kashan, Khalili Collections, London.

Fig. 43. Glaze golden bowl, 13th century, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Fig. 44. Glaze golden bowl, 13th century, Iranian National Museum, Tehran.

Fig. 45. Glaze bowl, 14th century, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Fig. 46. Glaze bowl with fish design, 14th century, Louver Museum, Paris.

Fig. 47. Blue glaze bowl with fish design, 14th century, Louver Museum, Paris.
One of the most important, yet comprehensive Iranian carpet designs, is fish Tangled or Harati. The curve of leaflet and circulation of head in bright colors in the inner side of leaflet show nice and calm movement of fish (Figs. 54, 55). Repetition of this kind of motifs in the carpet created a great and famous design that called fish tangled. The species and name of fishes in this design are numerous in
different states and regions including: fish-dog, tiny-fish, fish-circulate, bee-fish, fish-Frahan, Saneh-fish, etc.

The basis of Herati design is flower and vine resembling Shah Abbasi or lotus flowers; a flower drawn around the ring in a circular shape with oval leaves. Herati design and species of fish in the fish and flower consist of two round (usually eight) among them. It is obvious that in the Islamic period worshiping and praying on the carpet with animal designs was deemed inappropriate. Artists, therefore, changed and deformed the shape of animals and turned them to flowers and leaves forms (Hasouri 2010).

One of the most important myths in Ancient Iran was the creation myth. In that story, world is placed on the horn of a cow and the cow is located on the back of a fish. In Iranian semiotics, cow is the symbol of earthly world and in Persian literature, it is the world of water and earth. Fish is the symbol of protection in under earth. In Iranian myth, the name of the cow is Yhmvs and the name of fish is Lyvsa. Yhmvs in on the back of Lyvsa and Lyvsa in on a cliffs and nobody knows what is on the cliff (Gardideh 1997).

Different kinds of coins minted around the country in Safavid Era. Golden coin called Ashrafi, silver coin called Bisti, Mohammadi, Shahi and Abbasi also copper coin called Ghazi and known as Flous, Pashiz or Black money. They minted different designs of animals and Zodiac Signs on the Flous coins. Maybe the design of cow on the back on the fish was minted for New Year (Nowroz), in connection with Nowroz ritual or Da-labe Nowroz (Fig. 57). It seems that fish design was minted on the coins in the New Year and show the symbol of Pisces and depicts the ancient belief that the world is on the horn of a cow and cow is on the back of a fish. In the moment of New Year, cow jumped on the earth from one horn to the other.

In two petroglyphs in historical house of Hossein Panah in Isfahan, Qajar Era designs of fish can be
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seen (Figs. 58, 59). They are in the yard of the house and on the Darvish’s ax. Here; fish is the symbol of cognition and awareness. In the left petroglyph, the head of the fish is up and in the right it is vice versa.

Sufian believed that real master is like a fish saturated in the cognition of sea and other people are semi-fish. In the left petroglyph, Darvish is in the high rank and is real master but in the right one, Darvish is in the begging of the way of truth.

**Fish and fishing:** Archeologists discovered the remains of fish in Paleolithic Era in Iran. This Era started about 40 millennium B.C., and finished about 20 millennium, coincided with the end of the Ica Age. In this Era, cold and dry climate was increased. Perhaps because of this situation some parts of Iran were not suitable for living for human and animals.

Lorestan Cave is one of the places that many remains of fishes of rivers in Iran were discovered in 2005. It is obvious that those remains were fished by human or hunted by birds (Biglari 2014).

The animal archeology science determined some remains of fish bones in different parts of Iran. Between the remains of fishes from Damghan Tphhsar (2km from south of Damghan in center of Dasht-e Kavir and Alborz mountain range) Cyprinidae family was one of main nutritional people in this territory. These bones belong to bronze era in Hesar 3-B (2239-2640 B.C.) (Mashkour 1997).

Many researchers tried to determine the spices of fishes by the symbol of fishes on different places and in Mesopotamia in 3rd and 5th millennium B.C. (Coad 2015) but the results are versatile (Scheil 1918; Diemel 1926; Civil 1961; Landsberger 1962; Salonen 1970; Sahrhaage & Lundbeck 1992).

About 324 names of fishes were uncovered in Sumerian and Babylonian that were discovered about 90 spices of fishes in marine and freshwater (Fig. 60) (Coad 2015). Fishes were very important in daily life of human as nutrition and religious symbols in the past. In past, there were some rules for fishing, and disobedience was considered illegal. It seems that there were some Guilds and fishing cooperatives. They transported fishes to cities and fish marketing was very organized (Coad 2014).

Fishes were sun-dried, salted, pickled, fermented and possibly smoked. Fishers offered some parts of
fishes to temples and the others to people (Coad 2015). People did not eat fish in some days of the year (Sahrhage & Lundbeck 1992). In semi continent of India, people were prohibited to eat fish in some months like August, July, June and May. These months are the seasons of fish reproduction. Maybe this was one of the plans devised for preserving fishes in ancient time.

People in ancient time determined the kind and measure of necessary fishes like fresh, fried or dried fishes accurately. They commonly offered abundant spcies of fishes wholesale and rare ones were ordered in retail. It means people were awarded the science of ichthyodiversity. Sometimes, Assyrian Kings offered 10000 species of fishes in their parties. They used cheaper kind of fishes in these parties but Sumerian kings preferred plant eating craps that usually lived at the bottom of pits and muddy pools (Sahrhage & Lundbeck 1992).

Erudite like Radcliffe (1926), Salonen (1970) and Sahrhage & Lundbeck (1992), surveyed some fishing tools, different types of nets, lance, trap, copper hook in Sumerian, Acadian and Assyrian time (Salonen 1970). It seems that fish ponds were made in Darius II, in 422 B.C., and fishing goes back to 419 B.C.

Archaeological remains from Mesopotamia contains fish bones living about 3000 B.C., including Luciobarbus esocinus, Arabibarbus grypus, Luciobarbus kersin, Carasobarbus luteus, Mesopotamichthys sharpeyi, Luciobarbus xanthetaurus, Aspius vorax, Acanthroprama (presumably A. marmid), Cyprinion sp., Alburnus sp., Silurus triostegus, Mystus pelusi, Mastacembelus mastacembelus, Chelon (=Liza) abu, Acanthopagrus sp., Tenuososis ilisha, and now they are living too (Coad 2015).

Main parts of these fishes are cyprinid like Song, Shirbat, Barzam, Hamri, Bani, Gatan, Shalj, Semi Sardine, Loutak, Koli that are the most diverse types of family fishes in this region (Esmaeili et al. 2010). In this list, two species of catfishes are determined, two families of Siluridae and Bagridae, a spices of Mastacembelidae, a species of Mugilidae, a species of Alosa from Culpeidae family and one species of Sparidae. These kinds of fishes are dominant fauna in Mesopotamia and Persis region of Persian Gulf basin (Esmaeili et al. 2010, 2015).

To sum it up, this essay reviewed design of fishes in Iranian ancient and contemporary time by considering collections in different museums and books. They showed how artists connected their arts with fish designs and used them as religious, cultural, autistics, social and economical symbols. Also theses designs dated back to thousands of years ago, show the fauna of fishes in the past, and archeological remains inform the ichthyodiversity of that time which coincided with ichthyodiversity in the pre-sent time. More comprehensive study of plants and animals can reveal importance and secrets of Iranian artist. It is suggested that fish imagery on Iranian modern arts could be the subject of another paper as well.

**Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank A. Moradi, B.W. Coad, S. Sadeghi and H.R. Esmaeili for their valuable comments and editing the text.

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