

Abstract

The current study contributes to filling the gap in the studies of Iranian art history in terms of visual arts. Increased archeological findings in recent years have paved the way for obtaining a higher quantity of visual evidence of prehistoric eras. Most studies, in this regard, investigate the images on potteries on a case by case basis in order to figure out thoughts, beliefs, and culture of that era, thus neglecting the essence of these motifs.

The current fundamental study puts forward the statement that what the rudiments and principles of visual portrayal in prehistoric Iran were created many follow up questions; Is there a general compositional structure for creating images? If not, what general rules and methods were used to fit the images within the frame? Which visual elements and motifs were used the most? What are the visual principles according to which the image components are laid out? Are there unique or common visual indices for different regions and eras? To respond to such questions, the current historic-analytic study, utilizing painted potteries selected among other visual evidences, takes a formal approach with the aim of obtaining a general knowledge of visual attributes and tries to investigate the visual structure of images on potteries as mere images and evidence of forms, not content.

Southwest and South Zagros regions were selected as the geographical locations of the study for being adjacent to each other and being rich in images and having overlapping temporal eras and the findings related to these sites are collected through reading reports of archeological excavations and observation of museum artifacts. The criteria for image assessment were determined according to rules and principles of the existing visual arts and images and visual variables were classified into three categories, namely, general structure, visual elements and principles, and motifs with relevant subcategories. Images were inspected based on a designed analytic-comparative model.

In chapters one to three, the introduction, background, and methodology are introduced, respectively, and in chapter four the findings are introduced and analyzed on the basis of geographical regions and sites and the evolution of visual attributes in each geographical site is further discussed. In chapter five, the findings of each prehistoric era are comparatively studied and the existing indices, if any, of each region and era, are drawn out and, finally, the course of reformation and evolution of each visual variable is discussed in chapter six.

Prehistoric eras are temporally classified into archaic, early, middle, late 1 and late 2. Similarities between two sites were most observed in the archaic era and least observed in late era 2. Changes of the compositional structure and different motifs are, respectively, the source of the variety of images in Southwest and South Zagros regions. In some areas, image findings can be used for both qualitative and quantitative stylistic studies. Line is the dominant element having various structural and design applications in most regions. Repetition, asymmetry, movement, rotation, and contradiction are among the applied principles of images. Properties of the visual structure of images on painted potteries of other regions of prehistoric Iran may also be found by applying the proposed model with minor adjustments, according to new findings, in subcategories of visual variables. Awareness of the attributes and essence of images may prepare the ground for further applied and fundamental research.

Keywords: visual structure, painted potteries, Southwest, South Zagros, prehistoric