CHAPTER 6: MYTHS AND BELIEFS ABOUT ANIMALS IN IRAN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GILAN AND UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF IRON AGE OF GILAN
Chapter 6: Myth and beliefs about animals in Iran with special reference to Gilan and understanding cultural, social and religious traditions of Iron Age of Gilan:

6.1 Myth and beliefs in animals in Gilan and the surrounding regions:

Folklore, myths, legend and beliefs are the phenomena deeply rooted in the past, therefore studying and referring to that section of legend and beliefs about animals can be effective for better recognition of cultural, social and religious traditions of the Iron Age of Gilan. The oldest book which relates to legend of animals in Iran is Avesta, the holy book of the Zoroastrians and after that, some books from periods of royal dynasties of Iran and some books of the early Islamic periods such as Shahnameh by Ferdowsi refer to animal mythologies.

The legends concerning the beliefs of ancient Iran, of which Gilan was an integral part, include two groups:

The first group includes the legends which are derived from historical sources before the arrival of Islam and in the early Islamic period of Iran. They are considered more reliable due to their antiquity, though cultural and geographical borders of some regions such as Gilan are not clear.

The second group includes a set of books published in the contemporary era and includes reports which have originated from oral narrations of living people. Those legends and beliefs about animals which have been taken from ancient sources can be set forth in the cultural geography of Iran as a whole and cannot be separated regionally. However, some new sources and reports of folklore culture have included some materials in the regional framework of Gilan.
Therefore, some materials will be mentioned about the important legends and beliefs which are known in the general geography of Iran and narratives and reports taken from the folklore of Gilan in the contemporary period about both real and mythological animals.

6.1.1 Horse in myth and beliefs of the people of Iran in general and Gilan in particular

As specified in the earlier discussion of the presence of animals in Iron Age of Gilan, the only animal burial discovered at that period in the region was that of the horse which has been buried with special rituals, either independently or in association with a human burial.

In the holy book of Zoroastrians (Avesta), the gods are mentioned as riding horse-drawn chariots. It seems that the horse and riding had been common among a branch of the Aryans who arrived at Iran in late second millennium and early first millennium B.C. so that possessing horses and a proficiency in riding have been the prime factors of their victory over the previous inhabitants. It is found in sources and documents that the chariots of the Aryans were pulled by horses (Khodadadian 1997: 100). Assyrians who established a powerful government in the north of Iraq in the first millennium B.C. (Iron Age III) attacked their boundaries to capture horses and cattle which were abundant in the Median Tribe.

Considering the importance of horses to the ancient Iranians, some names of the great men and heroes of that period were accompanied by the word horse, for example, “Garshashb” meaning holder of thin horse, “Arjatasb” meaning holder of valuable horse, “Mehrasb” meaning fast horse, “Tomasb” meaning holder of strong horse. The names of four ancestors of Zoroaster are also accompanied by the word horse such as Poorshashb meaning holder of old horse. In Iranian legends, it has been mentioned that
Iranian gods and goddesses are carried by horses. The name of the guardian deity of four-footed animals is Doraspeh, meaning healthy horse. It has been said that Izad Bahram appears as a horse, Tishtar, the angel of rain appears as a white horse and Apoosh which is an evil god appears as a black horse without tail and mane. In a battle between Tishtar and Apoosh, the white horse emerges as the victor (Hinels 1994: 455).

In Gilan, like any other ancient civilisations, the horse has been used for riding and pulling vehicles. Up to the contemporary periods, the people of the Gilan Plains believed that wild horses lived in the forested regions in Mountains of Gilan. For this reason, those regions were sometimes called the land of wild horses.

In Gilan, there are different beliefs about horses including:

People believe that horse is a gentle animal because a stud horse never mates with its relatives such as its mother. An example was given from folklore for this trait of horses, in a story where the eyes of the horse were closed and it was taken to a place in order to mate with its mother. At that time, the stud horse opened its eyes while mating with its mother, and collapsed from the shock and died.

The rolling of horses in pasture is believed to be predictive of bad weather and rainfall and the continual rolling of a horse in pasture indicates that its mother is alive.

Bringing horse to home augurs either ill or good luck, when a horse goes missing, the daughter or daughter-in-law of the family removes her necklace, which is eventually placed on the mane of horse when the animal is found and brought home. If the necklace remains on the horse’s mane without falling on the ground, that horse would be auspicious; otherwise, the family would sell the horse.
If a horse drinks seawater, it indicates that the sea will be stormy soon. If the mane or tail of the horse was set on fire, there will be a quarrel in the owner’s home and good fortune will leave the home.

If a horse neighs many times, its owner will become rich, therefore, if a horse neighs at night, the owner of horse would immediately get close to it and put his right foot on the horse’s back and ask God for happiness and blessings.

When a person was afflicted with spasms, he was prescribed to eat horse meat because there is a belief that horse meat immediately cures this disease.

In Gilan, there are special beliefs about colour of horses, for example, people of Gilan believed that keeping a white horse at home banishes Satan from that house (this belief relates to the legend which believed that Tishtar, the angel of rain was a white horse. However, keeping a horse with a different colour of the mane and body is not considered ominous (Boshra 2004: 110 to 113).

6.1.2 Winged horse in legends and beliefs of Iranian people:

In the Iron age of Gilan, some images of winged horse are shown on the objects discovered from archaeological sites, and legends of this mythological animal are well known and quoted often.

In Iranian legends, the winged horse with Ahuraic (divine) power and the ability to fly is often depicted in the role of a savior, freeing the protagonist from various hardships. Ahmad Shamloo in his book, “Kocheh” narrates that people believed that in ancient times, winged horses lived in the sea and did not come to land until a prophet named Hazrat Soleiman invited them to land. The leader of the winged horses said that he would obey provided that women do not ride on the horses. However, mankind
violated this condition, as a result of which the horses lost their wings, becoming the horses that we know today (Hinels 1994: 457).

As Kazem Sadat Eshkavari quoted in his book “Legend of Malek Mohammad”, in one of the legends of Eshkavar Bala in Gilan, there is a story about winged horses: A man named Malek Mohammed wished to capture a ‘sea mare’ (the winged horses mentioned above) despite the admonitions of his father Shahi. In the end, Shahi gave in to his son and advised him to hide in a hollow tree on the beach until the mare came ashore to give birth. When the foal is alone, Malek Mohammad could capture it. His son followed his instructions, but because the foal was winged, it was able to fly away from him. However, as an act of kindness it pulled out one of its hairs to and gave it to the boy, and told him to burn it whenever he was in need. The horse promised to come to him to help immediately. When Malek Mohammad did so, the horse kept its promise and took him on a journey, from which they returned with a golden cup (Hinels 1994: 456).

6.1.3 Cattle and winged cattle in myth and beliefs of people of Iran and Gilan:

In Iron Age of Gilan, figurines and rhyton of cattle are more abundant than those of any other animals and also different objects of this period have been decorated with motifs of ordinary and winged cattle, and a hybrid animal that is half bull and half fish.

It seems that cattle along with goat and sheep were among the first grazing animals which have been domesticated by humans and remnants of such domesticated animals have been reported for the first time from Dehloran Hill in west of Iran (Hole, 1962).

Cattle were very important for the humans whether in the past or at present because man has utilized it for carrying loads and pulling vehicles, and ploughing in addition
to the use of milk, meat, skin, horns, hoof of this animal. In the past, even its dung has been used as fuel.

In story of Freidoon and Zuhak which is one of the mythological stories of Iran, it has been said that the “Barmayeh” cow released Freidoon from Zuhak’s captivity and freed him from danger. Since then, the descendants of Freidoon combined their name with the name of cattle. Some researchers believe that the family of Freidoon adopted the Cow as its totem (Bahar 2002).

In Zoroastrianism, the first symbolical animal was the bull whose soul is manifested in the form of a god called Goshoron and who helped Amshasep and Bahman. When this symbolic cow dies due to the domination of Satan, some plants grow from its body, which are used for feeding humans and herbivores. In addition, Zoroaster banned the sacrifice of cattle which was condemned as the practice of demon worshipers.

Cattle have been used in combination with the people and places’ names in ancient Iran due to its importance. For example, it has been said in Zuhak’s family tree that he was son of “Asfian Pargav” meaning a fat cow, of “Soggav” meaning red cow, and of “Boorgav’ or yellow cow. He was also the descendant of “Van Frooghgav” or white cow, before three generations (Boshra 2004: 130).

Except the realistic depiction of cattle as small statues or images found on objects of Iron Age of Iran and Gilan, other images of that period show cattle as a creature combined with a human body, or with a real or imaginary animal. For example, the body of cattle has been combined with head of human, which is called ‘gavmard’ (Bull-man). In other cases, it has been combined with fishes, which is called ‘gavmahi’ or Cow-Fish.
Although images of winged cattle are seen in ancient objects of Iran, such as the reliefs of Persepolis or on the objects of Iron Age of Marlik in Gilan, no factual evidence is found about it in the legends of Iran. However, there are many facts about the cow-fish in Iranian legend even though its image is not found on objects of these periods. In addition, it has been mentioned in Iranian legends that the earth is placed on the horn of a cow, which in turn stands on the back of large cowfish. Whenever the cow gets tired and shifts the earth from one horn to the other, it causes earthquakes (Hinels 1994: 458).

Beside the aforementioned stories which have been extracted from the ancient sources of Iran, a story of similar form has been quoted by the word of mouth in the Talesh district of Gilan in the villages surrounding Toul: It claims that the entire earth everything therein rests on a large cow. Whenever the cow wants to shake its ear, eyelid and tail, earthquakes will occur (Salimi Moayed 2004).

Stories relating to cattle from the people of Ahandan Village in east of Gilan is quoted as follows:

At the time of ploughing of a rice field in fall, a villager took his bull from its pasture to the field. On the first day of ploughing, the bull asked its owner to let it work only for half of a day and take a rest, but the villager didn’t agree. When the bull started working, it stopped working until the villager lost his temper and hit the bull on its back with a stick, the bull attacked in reply and gored the villager to the ground. The villager complained against the rebellious bull before Hazrat Ali (one of the Shiite Imams) and he asked the bull to take its tongue out. The bull did so and he pulled its tongue to be elongated, losing the power of speech, and then he pulled its eyelid down to seem subservient and not to disobey. After that, the bull became a gentle, useful and obedient animal (Boshra 2004: 131).
6.1.4 Deer in legend and beliefs of People of Iran and Gilan in particular:

In Iron Age of Gilan, remains of small figurines and images of antlered deer or deer without antlers are regarded as the third most common archaeological find. Large numbers of bone fragments of this animal have been discovered from the cemeteries of Iron Age of the region which not only confirms its presence but also sheds light on its special status to have achieved burial association. However, despite these descriptions in the old sources of Iran, there are no special myths about deer.

A story is quoted in Gilan as the legend of Siah Galesh which has sanctified cattle and deer on the one hand, and regards the cow as the origin of all deer. That narration implies that:

Once upon a day, a stock man and his son from a mountainous region of Gilan decided to stay on the mountain for a longer term and not to go to winter quarters despite the arrival of fall season and cold weather, in order for the livestock to graze more. But at dawn when the father had gone to Gilan plain for buying food, it stormed and snowed so heavily that the father couldn’t return to the mountain. The boy who stayed alone feared that he and his livestock might die at any moment but a handsome black man saved them. This man called Siah Galesh had miraculous powers, for example, when he touched a sack of rice, its amount increased and the animals were fed. Winter passed without any tragic consequences for the boy and his livestock. The father returned to the mountain after winter and feared that his son and all his livestock had died in the winter. When he arrived near the mountain hut however, he heard his bull mooing and when he got close, he was surprised to see that all were healthy and alive. When the small boy who told the father what happened, the father thanked Siah Galesh and offered to give him whatever he wanted. Siah Galesh asked for the bull because he liked it a lot. The father did so and Siah Galesh and bull disappeared. After that event, the people of the mountains of Gilan, and particularly people residing at
Amlash region believe that all mountainous deer came from the generation of the bull which *Siah Galesh* took with him (Boshra 2004: 26-27).

The legend of *Siah Galesh* in Gilan corresponds with the legend of Gooshvaroon in Zoroastrian religion which regarded all useful animals as descendants of the pure race of cattle and it is emphasized that cattle and deer are regarded as equal to some extent.

In Gilan, there is a general belief that any part of the deer has therapeutic properties, and can cure diseases of the corresponding part of the human body and it is also effective to eat deer meat for curing all internal diseases of body. In addition, when a person is afflicted with foot pains and backache, he will be cured if he massages his back and foot with the burnt marrow of deer bones.

### 6.1.5 Goat and Sheep in legends and beliefs of people of Iran and Gilan:

Goat and sheep are regarded as the first domesticated animals and their biological history with human dates back to the early Neolithic period. In sites of the Iron Age of Gilan, many bones of goat and sheep have been discovered among tombs which indicates that although the tomb has been burial place of humans, those animals have been killed and carcasses have been transferred to the tombs along with the figurines, rhytons and different images of goat and sheep.

Goat and sheep are among class of small hoofed animals and are classified as part of the bovine group under the family Bovidae. Goats usually are classified into two varieties- domestic and wild or mountainous groups, while sheep are classified into ewe and ram.

Ewes are hornless. Goat and sheep have many advantages, which have proved very important for the people who lived with limited facilities in the ancient times. Advantages of these animals include use of milk, meat, hair, skin and dung and it
seems that the shortcoming of the animal was their inability to carry loads and plough the farmlands, as compared with cattle.

In Gilan, the breeding of goat and sheep is common in mountainous regions and these regions are rich with sites of the Iron Age, i.e. the places in which these remains of goat and sheep have been found.

Legends of goat and sheep in Gilan have been linked to Hazrat Moses as a prophet who lived as a shepherd and bred goat and sheep, as a result, there are few legends and legends in which name of Hazrat Moses has not been mentioned, of course, it seems that this name has been added to legends and old stories after the arrival of Islam.

One of these narrations in Gilan quotes that Hazrat Moses, who shepherded and liked sheep very much advised the shepherds to mate ewes and rams at the same time, so that their offspring are born together (Boshra 2004: 149).

There is a legend of Moses and animals in the mountains of Talesh region and in the villages adjacent to the Iron Age cemetery of Toul in Gilan: one day, Hazrat Moses left his sheep in the care of a wolf and promised to reward it with one animal as payment for looking after the herd. After his return, Moses selected a ram as payment for the wolf, in order to keep his promise, but the ram objected and asked him: “why do you want to kill me? I can impregnate thousands of sheep every year.” After that, Moses selected an ewe but the ewe objected and said: “I am also useful to you and I can give birth to at least five hundred sheep for you, don’t give me to the wolf.”

Moses was thus unable to select any one of them and allowed the wolf to select one of them. Since then, wolves have been known to attack herds of sheep indiscriminately in order to exact the promised payment (Salimi Moayed 2004: 125-126).

6.1.6 Dog and wolf in legends and beliefs of people of Iran and Gilan:
Dogs and wolves are physically similar to each other. The body of the wolf is bigger and stronger. The mouth of the wolf is always open and its tongue is hung out and shaking, but the dog only exhibits such characteristics occasionally. In addition, the eyes of the wolf are always open even at time of sleep.

Dogs have been the first animals to have been domesticated by humans. The wolf is also an evil animal and the killer of goats and sheep. On the other hand, the dog is a useful animal and has acted as the guardian of goats and sheep in the past. Conventionally, the dog has always been a loyal animal for human beings.

Since these two animals are very similar to each other, there is a doubt about the figurine of dog or wolf discovered from Iron Age sites of Kalouraz and Marlik in Gilan though most of the commentators have assumed them to be dogs.

The *Avesta*, as a holy book relating to an eastern religion, has regarded the dog as a very valuable so that the presence of dogs was necessary in some religious ceremonies of the ancient Iranians. In Zoroastrianism, the dog was not only a respectful animal, but the Zoroastrians also believed that when a dog looked at a diseased person the evil spirits would be taken out of that person’s body.

In this religion, nursing a sick dog and taking care of newly born puppies for up to 6 months have been ascribed as part of the duties of a dog’s owner (Boshra 2004: 185).

In ancient and Iron Age Iran, the importance and value of dogs are evident because nomadic lifestyles and confrontations with robbers and wolves required a strong watch, and the dog was responsible for this duty. In the legends of Iran, some animals are selected by the Ahura and are chosen to be assistants of humans in the long battle against evil. The bull has the first rank in this regard and dog has the second rank because it is a loyal, obedient and kind animal. It has been said that some dogs have
miraculous powers. *Nasush* is an evil god which appears as an ugly bird and is driven away by a yellow haired dog or a white dog with yellow ears (Allen et al. 2005:66).

Some beliefs of the people of Gilan about wolves are as follows:

Wolves never follow other wolves, but they run next to each other because they are ravenous and do not trust in their own kind, and are continually afraid of being attacked by other wolves.

After wolf eviscerates a hundred sheep, folklore suggests that its mouth will be locked and will not be able to harm other livestock.

It is narrated that people of the mountains of Gilan resorted to prayer and magic to close the mouth of wolves in the past because they believed that if they became successful in closing the mouth of a wolf with prayer and magic, it no longer would be able attack the herds and kill goats and sheep.

People living at the capital of Gilan, Rasht, believe that *djinns* (dangerous invisible spirits) also fear wolves, therefore, if a person wants to banish *djinns*, when he whispers that ‘there is a wolf here’, the *djinn* will be afraid and will get away.

It is necessary to note that legend and beliefs of Iranians are not limited to the above animals but there were also beliefs about other quadrupeds such as lions, swine and monkeys and direct and indirect remains of such animals have been discovered in Iron Age sites of Gilan. For example, writings about some of these animals, taken from folklore culture of Talesh region, Gilan narrate that:

People of the region believe that seeing swine at any place is inauspicious. In another example, it has been said that human is descended from monkeys and humans had
originally existed in the form of monkeys, and gradually turned into modern humans (Salimi Moaeyd 2004).

6.1.7 Birds in legends and beliefs of people of Iran and Gilan (Phoenix, Eagle, and Crow):

Some reports of excavations in sites of Iron Age of Gilan indicate the presence of bones of birds among graves of that period, like Lasulokan and Ghias Abad cemeteries, but these indications have been mentioned without confirming the identification and only one comment about remains of bones inside a container beside a dead body in the Iron Age cemetery of Lasulokan has been confirmed, and it has been interpreted as a deliberate act. In fact, they were parts of the birds’ carcasses which were placed there for feeding the dead in the afterlife (Egami 1965).

The presence of birds in confirmed by the discovery of many figurines, rhytons, as well as embossed and etched designs of birds. In fact, most rhytons discovered in Iron Age of Gilan were initially identified as in the shapes of cattle, following which they were correctly recognised as birds.

Designs of eagle and vulture are evident in many designs applied on the objects discovered from Marlik. In some cases such as rhytons of partridge or small figurine of duck discovered from site of Maryan (Refer to: Fig No.4.67 and 4.140) and small figurine of owl (Refer to: Fig No. 4.172), the type of bird is evident, but the same cannot be said of rhytons and figurines discovered from other Iron Age sites of Gilan due to excessively stylized images.

Some of the images applied on objects are not regarded only as images of birds but they are considered as mythological creatures combining some parts of the human, bird and animal anatomy. Such appearances of combined creatures are in line with
mythological stories. In other words, in the legends of Iran, composite birds such as phoenix and *homa* are more common than real birds such as eagle, crow, partridge, or dove.

The Phoenix has been mentioned frequently in the legends of Iran and some have identified it with the eagle, some have assumed it as equivalent to hawk due to its composite anatomy and since this bird is mentioned as suckling its chicks, some have assumed it as equivalent to the bat. For example, the mythological phoenix of Iran, referred to as eagle, has been mentioned in the Avesta. Poor Davoud (Iranian historian and interpreter of ancient texts) regards phoenixes as the same as hawk (Hinels 1994: 439).

Phoenix has the characteristics which are respected by societies of that period, for example, the feathers of the phoenix were used in Zoroastrian religion for neutralising magic, and as Poor Davoud has interpreted, this bird is the harbinger of salvation and victory.

*Homa* also was known as messenger of happiness in Iranian legend and it is sometimes known as bird of happiness. There are different descriptions of the characteristics of this bird. Some imagine this bird as similar to real birds such as hawk, eagle and falcon, and some interpret this bird as a completely unreal bird (which was known was able to lay eggs made from gold and make its owner wealthy).

In Zoroastrian legends, there is no evidence of a bird called “*homa*” but there are many legends about that bird in folklore. In one of these stories, it is said that if the shadow of *homa* is cast on a person, he will become happy and prosperous and if this bird sits on the head of a person, he will succeed to the throne. In this regard, it has been narrated by Sadat Eshkavari who has compiled several ancient fictions of Eshkavar region in Gilan in a book named “*Ketabnameh*”: 
One brother out of three goes to an unknown region where the king was dead, and had no successor. A bird (*homa*) is released and it is decreed that the person it sits on will succeed to throne. The bird sat on the boy and he succeeded to throne (Hinels 1994: 443).

Many legends and beliefs about the crow are found in the culture of Iran. In Mithraism, which was derived from the religion of the ancient Iranians, the crow was symbol of having the honor of visiting the Mithraic grotto; therefore, the people inducted into the religion for the first time wore a crow mask on their faces when they had the honor of visiting.

At present, the people of Gilan regard the call of the crow, especially at dawn, as a sign of bad news. In Luristan, Iran, it is fortunate to find a crow at time of hunting and people of this region believe that the crow never dies naturally, unless killed violently. This is due to it drinking the elixir of life. Legends and beliefs of people of Iran and Gilan include some reptiles and insects in addition to animals and birds and since some direct and indirect remains of these animals have been found in the sites of Iron Age Gilan, some of these beliefs are mentioned:

In ancient Iran, there was a belief that what goes out of human body such as feces, hairs, nail, breath (exhalation) of human are dead and unclean and some animals and insects have been symbol of death and uncleanliness, for example, the beetle, ant and mouse are symbols of evil and death, therefore, demons appear as mice with shiny eyes and the evil spirit of a woman may appear in the form of a fly.

From the viewpoint of Zoroastrianism, creatures such as frogs and toads are considered ugly who are detrimental to creation because they swallow roots of trees and eggs. They also regard certain venomous snakes as evil and symbol of darkness (Allen *et al* 2005:67).
People of the villages adjacent to Toul in Gilan believe that there are two classes of snakes in the world: one group which is good and does not harm humans, and the second group, which are evil snakes that see humans as prey and hunts them (Salimi Moyaed 2004).

6.2 The presence of animal and its relation with 'religious' characteristics of Iron Age of Gilan

One of the most important questions regarding the 'archaeological presence' of animals in Iron Age sites of Gilan is their relation, if any, to the then religious practices of the time, or whether their presence, direct or indirect, indicates certain religious beliefs or thought. In other words, the relation between these animal remains and the religious beliefs of the period are an issue that remains unresolved.

It is very difficult to understand and recognize the religious beliefs of people in historical periods, particularly the periods where written records are absent or rare.

The aspects of fear and of believing in the presence of some occult forces of animals have forced humans of that period to worship animals or a particular kind of animal. Therefore, religious aspects of believing in animals have resulted from the following phenomena:

6.2.1 Belief in Divine Traits of Some Animals (Totemism):

Some religions of the period under study looked at certain birds as the spirit of God or creator, or the creatures which could affect the phenomena of creation. Therefore, due to such beliefs, that bird was regarded with respect and consequently, idols or figurines of the bird were created for worship.
In the Celtic culture in Scotland, the swan was regarded as powerful bird with divine characteristics, therefore, this bird was never killed and this belief has remained as a taboo among the people of Scotland until the contemporary period.

In the 19th century in Southern California, North America, a great ceremony was held every year which was called the ‘bird ceremony’. In this ceremony, “people gave vultures to the head of temple with special religious rituals to kill it without shedding a drop of its blood. Its skin remained intact; the feathers were plucked and used for clothes. Finally, the body of the bird was buried in a hole in the temple and there was a belief that the bird would return with double power after awhile” (Serjeantson 2009: 336).

In North America, the eagle and crow were regarded as divine animals more than any other bird but in regions and cultures such as Ainu of Hokkaido in North Japan, bears and eagles were mostly respected and sanctified. It is necessary to note that when a tribe or social group selected a bird or animal as their totem, they also thought that the creature would not hunt them as prey.

Considering the presence of the remains of animal in Iron Age of Gilan which have been discussed in chapter 4 and the special legends and beliefs which were discussed above, it can be said that many animals have been respected and sanctified in this period and region. In this regard, it can be accepted that these animals, especially male individuals, had been respected which is reflected by the abundance of small figurines and images of various animals.

Therefore, making rhytons from special animals such as cattle and bird in the Iron Age of Gilan had religious aspect and it seems that they preferred to drink ritual wine, milk or any other libation from inside a container in the form of the revered animal and the presence of rings on the back of some figurines indicated that this ring was used for
hanging figurines around people’s necks or in a special place which had religious aspects, and indicated respect for those animals. This caused the spirit of the animal in the figurine to be present beside the human and protect them from danger if necessary. It is necessary to note that rhytons of animals, such as cats, lions and snakes are absent, and the figurines of these animals from the Iron Age of Gilan do not have rings on the back allowing them to be worn. This issue is in line with Iranian legends which assumed these animals as evil.

The burial of horses in some sites of the Iron Age of Gilan such as Marlik, Kalouraz and Maryan was believed by the writer (candidate) not to have any religious reason, as in the animal was sacred and deserved a burial, but as a resource for the deceased to utilize in the afterlife. On the other hand, it can be argued that cattle were also necessary animals and should have been buried with the dead- the absence of such burials may indicate that there was some religious significance for cattle that prevented such treatment.

6.2.2 Feared animals:

The dangerous nature of some animals and the belief of humans in the presence of some occult forces in form of those animals have created the feeling of respect, belief and fear from these animals. In some cases, humans have made idols in the form of these animals, or carried certain body parts- such as fragments of horn- of those animals as protection against them. The difference between the respect given to this class of animals, and that of the first group (Totemism) is that respect for animals due to kindness, sanctification, and the understanding of its value or utility while the respect in the second group is due to fear and a desire for protection against the dangers of that animal.
Anthropological sources give evidence at different times and places of how people feared certain animals. For example, the local people of Kilda Island in Iceland killed the last penguin which went to that island because they believed that it had been enchanted. For example, in New Guinea, the fantail pigeon is regarded as a magician. In Ancient Rome, people feared the cry of owls and in the Middle Ages, owl was regarded as an evil bird, symbolizing witchcraft and darkness and a harbinger of death.

In the Iron Age of Gilan, small figures and images of animals such as the wolf, snake, lion and leopard are found, which are regarded as symbols of evil or dangerous animals in the legends and beliefs of that region. Whether the presence of these images implies that humans of that period and region feared them or well recognised the perils involved in any encounter, is an important question.

In two cases of images of the objects discovered from Marlik, it is found that humans are expelling or banishing vermin and evil animals (leopard and lion) and saving useful animals (goat and cattle) from the same, which can be religious or regarded as an ethical action, which indicates helping the oppressed and useful animals (Refer to: Fig. 4.190 and 4.193). In the Iron Age of Gilan, the figurine of owl has also been discovered (Refer to: Fig. 4.172) but not only is this animal not regarded as symbol of evil and darkness in folklore culture and legends of Iran and Glan, but it is also regarded as a symbol of wisdom along with the crow.

6.2.3 Birds as messengers from God:

In this line of religious thought, considering that birds are able to fly, they are identified with human souls from two perspectives. One of them is that the soul after death is separate from the body according to religious beliefs, and thus stays in the heavens. Therefore, the birds that inhabit the heavens (or skies) are seen to symbolize the souls of virtuous humans who reached heaven after death. Most religious thoughts
show that God resides in heavens, traditionally associated with the sky. Therefore the
birds capable of flight and ascent to high places can communicate with God, therefore,
birds can carry and narrate messages between humans, their ancestors, and God. Based
on this thought, birds such as eagles which are able to fly at higher levels are naturally
considered closer to God and are therefore given more respect.

It is also believed that birds can carry food for the deceased ancestors of humans. Even
today, people in India put food on roofs of houses for feeding crows on one day of the
year, according to a tradition which persists from ancient practices, and believe that
the crow can carry some of that food for their deceased ancestors. This tradition is
carried by widows in the Indian city of Lucknow for sending food to their deceased
husbands during special ceremonies to satisfy the manes. In South America among the
Wai Wai tribe, the shamans and magicians put the feathers of certain birds on their
body and clothes and believe that they could transform into birds in this way and can
carry the messages of humans to the heavens (Serjeantson 2009: 339).

Images and figurines of the bird are found in the Iron Age of Gilan, but the question
remains whether they have been created as a product of the above religious thought
which regards birds as messenger from God. This has probably been a factor for
respect for birds and the creation of their images and figurines. It is not possible to
conclusively answer this question at present but is it likely that some of the bird motifs
have been created due to these beliefs. Generally, it can be found that beliefs in certain
animals have included an important part of the religious beliefs of people at that
period, considering the evidence of the presence of animal in Iron Age, and it can
certainly be said that religious beliefs in animal elements has been stronger than that in
other elements such as anthropomorphs, plants and astral elements.
6.3 *The presence of animal and its relationship with economic and social characteristics of Iron Age of Gilan:*

It was mentioned in chapter 3 of this thesis that economy and subsistence of communities in the Iron Age have been based on animal husbandry, agriculture and hunting among which the role of animal husbandry has been the most important. Although agriculture was less frequent than animal husbandry in this period, this situation was not universal and it seems that agriculture was more common in the Roudbar district due to the presence of more fertile plains than two other districts i.e. Dailaman and Amlash. Agriculture was also more common in the district of Talesh, and this factor has been effective in ensuring the presence of cattle and symbols of cattle, which were related to cultivation in Roudbar district (Sefidrood).

The use of animals in economic and social issues of Iron Age is known from two perspectives: one is intangible uses such religious and spiritual aspects as mentioned above, and the other is tangible including the contribution of animals to agriculture, transportation, supply of food to humans, etc.

6.3.1 *Belief in divination role of animals in natural disasters:*

This belief of humans in animals can be regarded as part of religious issues but it is believed by the present writer that these practices and beliefs stemmed from a desire to adapt to and utilize the immediate environment that the people found themselves in. The practices and beliefs that concern animals arose as cultural symbols of this phenomenon.

The Ancient Greek and the Romans imagined the cry of special birds such as crow or owl as a sign of misfortune which could occur as storm, flood or earthquake.
In another example, it is said that the flight patterns of vultures and eagles in sky was believed by the ancient Romans to be meaningful, such that if they fly from left to right, it can indicate victory in an impending battle. There were even beliefs concerning the death throes of chickens after they were decapitated, which could be used to predict the future by the priests of the period. (Serjeanson 2009: 337).

According to the *Rigveda* in India, the monkey is known as the narrator of ancient stories and an augur of the future. In this regard, perhaps, the image of a monkey at the bottom of the designs applied to one of the cups discovered from Marlik called the “Cup of Life” (Refer to: Fig. 4.188) confirms this attitude.

Some other signs of animals which indicate the occurrence of certain phenomena are not only fanciful or mythological, but are based on scientific fact. One of these signs is that some animals perceive the occurrence of earthquakes more immediately than humans. Another example is the appearance of birds such as swallows and pelicans in the sky of the Northern Hemisphere of the earth, which indicates the start of the spring season. The head and beak of Pelican are a common motif on spouted containers of Iron Age of Gilan.

### 6.3.2. Role of animals in agricultural and transportation activities:

Cattle and buffalo have always played an important role in the performance of agricultural activities such as ploughing, cultivation and harvesting of crop since ancient times. These animals have played an important role in carrying loads and passengers at that period. Representations of carts in the Iron Age of Iran show cattle along with horses for carrying carts. In the Iron Age of Gilan, some figurines of humped bulls have been discovered from the site of Marlik with ploughs attached to their backs (Refer to: Fig. 4.87). These figurines are reliable evidence that the bull has
been used in the Iron Age of Gilan to plough farmlands and figurines of this type are evidence of the agriculture at that period and region.

Some figurines of cattle discovered from the Iron Age of Gilan have wheels installed at the base. The presence of these wheels indicates a familiarity of the people of that period with wheel and its use in carrying loads and passengers on the one hand and indicates that cattle have participated in carrying loads and passengers with four-wheeled carts (Refer to: Fig. 4.69, 4.88, 4.109).

Horses and donkeys were among the animals which were very efficient and useful for riding and carrying loads, particularly in the historical periods. The horse was generally more suitable than the donkey due to its superior speed and stamina, which made it suitable for riding and traveling to far regions. Instead, the donkey was more suitable for carrying loads- particularly in mountainous and difficult regions. Figurines of horses and donkeys in Iron Age sites of Gilan have been discovered that confirm this pattern of usage. Small figurines of horse with a human figurine on its back discovered from Marlik indicates the use of horse for riding (Refer to: Fig. 4.110), while another statue of horse has a feature that resembles a saddle installed on its back, emphasizing this function of horse as a mount (Refer to: Fig. 4.112). In the Iron Age site of Marlik, a rhyton of a donkey was discovered with two bulges on either side of its back indicating a carriage of loads (Refer to: Fig. 4.61). Figurines of donkeys also clearly prove the present claim of using donkeys in the Iron Age of Gilan for load bearing.

As mentioned above, it is evident that the two important factors of agriculture and transportation, that affected the economy of the Iron Age of Gilan, have greatly depended on cattle, horses and donkeys respectively.
6.3.3 Role of animals in subsistence and food supplies of people in Iron Age of Gilan:

Many sites of Iron Age Gilan have been located in the regions which are suitable for animal husbandry, while the forests adjacent to these regions act as suitable habitat of all kinds of wild animals have been regarded as suitable place for hunting.

There are abundant evidences that animal husbandry has been known as the earliest economic activity in the Iron Age of Gilan. One of these evidences is the excessive attention given to animals such as cattle, goats, sheep and dogs.

Although it is natural that livestock has played an important role in the supply of dairy products and the diet of the people in the Iron Age of Gilan, there is no special evidence that milk or other animal products were used as food of people in Iron Age of Gilan from archaeological investigations or even in art and iconography of the period, which show a complete lack of evidence for milking. However, it is imagined that some rhytons which were suitable for liquids, or the discovery of a kind of ceramic container interpreted as ‘feeding bottle’ from the sites such as Ghale Kouti, Halime Jan and Joboun are indirect evidence of the consumption of milk. These assumptions can only be confirmed by future residue analysis using the advances in palaeobiochemistry like the recent residue studies in Lybia.

As mentioned before, fragments of animal bones inside containers placed beside the body in Lasulokan and Ghias Abad cemeteries have been interpreted as offerings of food for the deceased. Therefore, it can be found that the consumption of animals was a common element of the diet of people at that period. In addition, scenes of animal hunting on objects such as that discovered from Marlik (Refer to: Fig.4.193) or the case discovered from Kalouraz (Refer to: Fig. 4.195) indicate that both agricultural life and hunting of animals for their meat and other byproducts were common.
6.3.4 The Presence of Animals and its probabilistic Role for entertainment:

Some animals always invoke a feeling of frivolity in children. Even today, it is observed that the face and designs of many toys have been made in the form of animals. In the Iron Age of Gilan, there are figurines and rhytons which appear to be similar to modern toys.

There is no reason to believe that all figurines of animals which have been made at that period have been inspired by cultural, mythological and economic concepts. The form of some figurines and images of animals indicate that the artists and people of that period have been flexible enough to produce statues of an animal for amusement.

Although it seems that the ringed figurines for hanging have had some religious function, some examples of rhytons and statues have been found which sometimes can be interpreted as toys of that period, or at least intended for the use of children. For example, the figurines discovered with wheels installed at the base or legs, or rhytons of smiling bears (Refer to: Fig No. 4.62, 4.88, 4.109) may be made for playing and entertainment, especially of children.

The myths and legends of a region are actually a fossilisation of thoughts, as the lores and underlying thoughts are cumulative in nature and reflect the mindset and the immediate environs through time and space. In such a case the myths and oral traditions that have been discussed earlier may actually reflect a cumulative human response to his biological and natural surroundings for over several thousand years and the core of the entire concept may yet be primordial in its origin. Subsequent additions may have been affected by Zoroastrian and Islamic mythology but the core f this mythological corpus may predate both of these cultural contexts, having drawn and imbibed from them (as well as other sources). It should thus be viewed in the context of actual beliefs of the people of Iran in general and Gilan in particular.
Therefore the myths and oral traditions have been a potential source to understand the rationale behind such a diverse repertoire of artistic manifestations of animal morphology in art and iconography of Iron Age Gilan. It thus justifies the efforts undertaken in recognising animals as the life line of their subsistence and livelihood, as reflected in the profusion of animals in the archeological remnants, indicating their importance during life and beyond death.