

A Study on the Decorative Motifs of Metal Candlesticks of the Timurid Period

Abstract

The Timurid period is one of the most significant periods in Islamic metalwork including the presence of exquisite candlesticks with very delicate and superior decorations; they are obtained in abundance and currently preserved in museums worldwide. In this research, an attempt is made to examine the samples of these candlesticks; therefore, their form and decorations are analyzed along with their features and characteristics. Also, the association between the motifs and their functions will be discussed. It is expected that in line with this research, by using the information available in various books, internet sources and field studies, the course of development of motifs, decorations and form of these examples will be debated and how the effects of other arts in these works will be evaluated. According to the studies conducted in this research, it is determined that most of the metal candlesticks of this period are made of brass adorned with casting technique. The basic form of all these examples is an incomplete cone; additionally, during the end of the Timurid period, the making of double-headed candlesticks, specifically the dragon-headed candlestick, became common in Iran. For more beauty, these samples are decorated with inlaid, black pen and tinning techniques in multi-colored form and the body of these candlesticks are divided with geometric knots and boards and mostly decorated with plant, geometric, human and animal decorative motifs. These candlesticks are well seen in the paintings of that period, which is a proof of their widespread use in the daily life of the people of the mentioned period.

Research aims:

۱. Examining the decorations and motifs of candlesticks of the Timurid period.
۲. Studying the relationship between the motifs and inscriptions used in candlesticks and their functions.

Research questions:

۱. What forms and decorations were applied in the candlesticks of the Timurid period?
۲. What is the affiliation between the motifs and inscriptions used on the candlesticks and their functions?

Keywords: metal candlesticks, Timurid metalwork, decorative motifs, motif, inscription

Introduction

Metalworking as an art-craft has long occupied a central place among other art industries. In Iran and Afghanistan during different governments, high-quality metal objects have been made. Among these examples, beautiful candlesticks made of bronze and brass are remained from the Timurid period that are currently preserved in museums worldwide. These examples have different grades in terms of work and gender; Most of them are decorated with representations of people, herbal and geometric motifs and adorned with inscriptions with Persian poems in the Kufif and Naskh script.

At present, there are very few specific researches about the candlesticks of the Timurid period, with no extensive research. Merely in sources such as "Masterpieces of Iranian Art" by Arthur Upham Pope, "Iranian Art" by Zaki Mohammad Hassan, "Seven Thousand Years of Metalworking Art in Iran" by Mohammad Taghi Ehsani and a few other books concerning Timurid metalwork, the candlesticks of this period are deliberated. However, regarding the most comprehensive and original source, the book "According to Zarini Az Behesht, Metalwork of the Timurid Period in Iran" written by Linda Komarov can be stated. In this book, there are detailed explanations regarding the metalwork of the Timurid period including the techniques applied and material used. In most of the other sources, an overview of the metalworking of different periods since the beginning of Islam has been discussed, from which information about the history of metalworking can be gained.

Considering the lack of examples of candlesticks obtained from the Timurid period and other epochs and also the limited amount of detailed and comprehensive information; data was gathered from museums of Astan Quds Razavi Museum and the Tomb Museum of Sheikh Safiuddin Ardabili; furthermore, reliable internet sources were also used to collect information for the accomplishment of the current research which is based on a historical-analytical method. Therefore, in line with the objectives of the research, we have analyzed the form and decorations in ۳۴ candlestick samples obtained from the Timurid period from Iran whilst analyzing the art of metalwork of this period.

Conclusion

Conferring to the materials presented in this research and the comparison of the obtained works, the following deductions are made:

١. According to the available statistics of the Timurid period candlesticks of Iran, sixteen of these works are made of brass, five of copper and three of bronze. The result is clear that these candlesticks were first made of brass, then copper and bronze, and candlesticks of any other material were not found in any of the areas of the Timurid period. Although only one pottery sample has been found from the Seljuk period.

٢. From the obtained candlesticks, ٢٠ casting samples and three hammering samples were made, and in some samples, casting and hammering were used together; likewise, four found works are latticed. Therefore, most of the candlesticks of the Timurid period were made by casting method.

٣. From the samples obtained, all ٢٤ existing works have a conical base; among them, eight examples of candlesticks were made with a dragon's head and a conical base. By comparing the works obtained from Iran and other places, the base form of most of the metal candlesticks made in all regions followed a fixed pattern and most have an incomplete conical base. Also, the making of two-branched candlesticks has become popular since the end of the Timurid period and this example was made in the form of two-branched candlesticks with a dragon's head in Iran at the end of the fifteenth century, and after that, the making of two-headed candlesticks continued to some extent in the Safavid period.

٤. In the candlesticks of this period, for more effect and beauty, the techniques of inlaying with silver, tinning the surface of the body and black pen have been used to create color diversity; that the final work with the color contrast created between the golden body and the black soot or silver motifs has gained a double effect. Among the obtained works, eight inlay samples, seven tinned and sixteen black pen samples were obtained. Therefore, most of the motifs of these candlesticks are written in black ink, then inlaid and tinned.

٥. Inscriptions of candlesticks; these inscriptional designs are carved in decorative houses, narrow strips around the body, neck and top of the body of the artwork. Giving to the existing samples, nine cases of Naskh script, six works of Thulth script and one Kufic script have been used. Occasionally, in some examples, Naskh and Thuluth lines are used together in different parts. Therefore, it can be concluded that in this period, Kufic has almost given its place to the Naskh and Thulth scripts. Also, the concept of most engraved inscriptions is a wish for good

luck and blessings for the owner of the candlestick, which is sometimes written along with the praise of the king or the sultan of the time. In a few of these works, the name of the maker or the date of making the candlestick is also engraved. Consequently, the exact date of the creation of these works or its artist is unknown. A number of candlesticks are gifted or dedicated to a special place or person. In a handful of these works, Arabic texts or Persian poems are used, and sometimes these poems are related to the function of the candlestick and are written in the description of the candle, and the poems of the poets of the time are engraved on them. Nonetheless, among the present poetry in hand, only three instances are about candles and candlesticks. Hence, this point rejects the hypothesis that the text of the inscriptions used in the decoration of the Timurid period candlesticks are more or less related to their function. Of course, on the candlesticks and standing lamp bases of the Safavid period, poems are mostly observed; but then again during the Timurid period, few candlesticks contained such themes.

٦. From the information obtained from the works of this period, most candlesticks of the Timurid period are decorated with various motifs. In ٢٠ of these works, herbal motifs, ١٩ examples of geometric motifs and knotting and assemblage, ١٢ examples of animal motifs, either in the form of patterns or in the form of the body of candlesticks, and six human motifs are carved. Most of these motifs are similar to the motifs used on other metal works of this age and previous periods. Only in special cases, such as bronze candlesticks, patterns influenced by Chinese art have been carved, which is interesting in its own way. Also, applying the role of the dragon on the candlesticks of this period is probably due to the influence of Chinese art and the positive role of the dragon in the culture of the Far East. In the works of this period, as in the previous periods, animal and human motifs are sometimes used individually and at times together in scenes of court life, hunting and other themes. By comparing the candlesticks of the previous periods and the Timurid period, it has been concluded that in this period, animal and human motifs were used to a lesser amount and gradually with the beginning of the Safavid period, these motifs gave way to herbal and Islamic motifs. Nonetheless, still in their works, traces of these motifs can be observed.

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