

The Art of Zarkeshi and Related Skills

Abstract

Zarkeshi is one of the traditional professions related to handicrafts, in which the craftsman, after melting the silver ingot into a thick silver wire, covers it with a thin gold sheet, and by ironing in several stages, the wire is twisted into hundreds of meters of fibers (thread) and converts thin gold and silver. This profession is of great importance in order to provide raw materials for many handicraft fields. Despite being several thousand years old and the deep influence of this profession in the formation and completion of many handicraft fields; moreover, due to reasons such as people's lack of familiarity with this profession and the importation of cheap foreign handicrafts and golden and silver plastic fibers, as well as the difficulty and labor of production, this art has gradually lost its past value. The current research has been carried out in a descriptive and analytical way while relying on data from library sources and field observations. Research shows that since golden and silver fibers of different thickness and shapes are used in the production of twenty-seven handicraft threads, these threads owe their existence to this profession. In terms of shape and appearance, the fibers are used in four ways in these fields; including: ١- simple and round shapes, which are the same as the initial shape of the wire after winding. ٢- flat and wide shapes that are obtained by passing the round wire through the knitting or rolling machine known as the Naghdeh thread. ٣- flat and wide shapes that are wrapped around the silk thread and the Golabton thread is obtained. ٤- springy and hollow shapes with elasticity obtained by twisting the Naghdeh thread around a rotating iron rod.

Research aims:

١. Researching the background of the arts related to Zarkeshi in Iran.
٢. Investigating the types of arts related to Zarkeshi in Iran.

Research questions:

١. How old is the art of Zarkeshi?
٢. Which arts in Iran are related to Zarkeshi?

Keywords: Zarkeshi, related profession, metal fibers, glass-toning.

Introduction

A look at the history of art shows that Iranians were one of the first peoples who played a major role in the creation of handicrafts. They continually responded to their sense of beauty by using natural elements and mixing them with an artistic taste in addition to satisfying the basic need. The consequence of this has been the creation of exquisite, creative and noteworthy works throughout history. The result of this has been the creation of exquisite, creative and noteworthy works throughout history. Ingenuity is one of the skills that can be mentioned as one of the creative achievements of mankind. Although the age of this profession is not known correctly, nonetheless, based on written sources, samples of Zarkeshi fabrics available in museums, dresses and curtains decorated with decorations such as tapestry and flower embroidery belonging to the palaces of the Achaemenid, Parthian and Sassanid eras. The age of this profession in Iran reaches at least ۲۵۰۰ AD. Historical documents and visual evidence show the wide use of metal fibers in various arts in Iran, particularly in the Sassanid era. In this period, the weaving and interlacing industry of silk fabrics has grown significantly. Despite the short break caused by the advent of Islam in the weaving of textiles, this industry flourished again in the Al-Buyeh era and thenonce again during the Seljuk era.

The influence of Chinese culture and art in Iranian weavings and textiles during the Seljuq period and the continuation of this process in the Ilkhanid and Timurid era caused changes in the texture of woven fabrics and their textile decorations. With the rise of the Safavids and the extensive support of the Shah and the courtiers for art and artists, a platform was provided for various arts, including textile weaving, metalwork, embroidery and architecture to experience their peak of glory and thus the influence of Chinese culture was lost. Also, during the Safavid era, new arts related to the Zarkeshi arts and profession such as velvet weaving and gilding emerged. The interference and influence of Western culture and art triggered the appearance of such arts which were widely considered until the end of the Qajar period. Despite the prevalence of arts such as gilding and tapestry in the present era and of course the use of thin metal fibers, in recent years due to the lack of use of these fibers or their replacement with plastic fibers in the texture of woven fabrics, velvet, cashmere, gold-colored decorative strips, moreover, the types of embroidery, the value and authenticity of these traditional arts have

been endangered and as a result, the life of Zarkeshi profession has been overshadowed to some extent.

Until now, in several books and articles on the subject of gold weaving and Golabetun making, there have been brief details about the production of thin metal fibers and wires. Nevertheless, in this article, in addition to introducing the Zarkeshi profession as an independent profession and skill, all related handicraft fields are examined in a detailed and focused way so that the necessity of its revival and popularization is more visible. The current research is of descriptive-analytical type and part of its information was collected in the library method and another part due to the lack of written sources regarding many fields included in this research was collected by field method and direct interviews with artists from different regions of the country.

In the present research, an attempt has been made to introduce the profession of goldsmithing as an independent profession and skill, and to examine all the handicraft fields related to it, subsequently, in addition to preserving the common fields related to this profession, such as gilding on steel, tapestry making, and embroidery, while prospering this art, a step should be taken in the direction of reviving other arts related to this profession, while preserving its Iranian-Islamic authenticity.

Conclusion

The art of Zarkeshi is a skill in which the artist carefully and patiently shapes the silver ingot into a thick wire shape after melting and molding, covers it with thin gold sheets, and then polishes it with heating and hammer blows, and at the final stage, iron plating turns it into thin gold fibers. Exploration among the fields of handicrafts indicates the wide use of these fibers in products such as carpets, textiles, traditional decorative embroidery and metal handicrafts. The wide use of these fibers in various professions and fields of handicrafts not only makes such artistic items stunning and shiny, but also materially increases its value. Therefore, in the past, Zarkeshi fabrics, decorative embroideries with Naqdeh and Golabetun thread were used for the king's clothes, courtiers' robes, palace curtains and hallways; moreover, they were also exported in many periods. In this regard, all the fields of handicrafts that owe their existence to this artistic profession and are included in the four main groups of handicrafts (traditional textile, traditional embroidery, metal handicrafts and traditional crafts related to handicrafts). The study in the fields related to this profession led us to the conclusion that the metal fibers used in these fields are of four types in terms of shape and appearance:

- ١- Simple and round shapes, which are the same as the initial shape of the wire after winding.
- ٢- Flat and wide shapes that are obtained by passing the round wire through the knitting or rolling machine known as the Naghdeh thread.
- ٣- Flat and wide shapes that are wrapped around the silk thread and the Golabton thread is obtained.
- ٤- Springy and hollow shapes with elasticity obtained by twisting the Naghdeh thread around a rotating iron rod.

Considering the widespread use of metal fibers in Iranian art from before the Achaemenes era until now, Zarkeshi is presented as an independent profession and skill worthy of attention. Throughout history, braids and stitches have experienced many ups and downs in terms of the extent of production, from prosperity in the Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid eras to the downfall of the present time. Paying attention to the mentioned materials makes it clear that the decline of the Zarkeshi profession will not only cause the loss of a part of the rich Iranian-Islamic art and authenticity of this border and region, nevertheless, will also lead to the loss of some related disciplines such as Sorme-Doozi and Golabetun embroidery. Therefore, in order to prevent this, it is necessary to take measures to preserve and restore this valuable art.

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