

A Case Study of Shiite Art and Religious-Ritual Symbols in Safavid Metal Works

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Abstract: *Traditional artworks in different periods, especially after the advent of Islam in Iran, have benefited a lot from text adornment, due to the emphasis of this religion on science, literacy, and its positive approach to the use of calligraphy. Needless to say, the use of calligraphy was not merely decorative; it was used more to convey a message and show the status of an issue. Metal working in the Safavid period has many artistic and religious values in material and spiritual aspects. Safavid artists have used religious themes, mystical, and Quranic concepts in decorating their works. In their works, they have revealed the mysterious manifestations of mysticism, Islamic religion, and Shiite religion. Samples of metal objects with calligraphy with Quranic content and religious devotions have been investigated. The findings indicate that, in addition to having a decorative aspect, Safavid metalworking has taken its motifs from the common religious thought of that period, namely the Shiite religion. Inside their forms and motifs, these objects are created symbolically as an illustration of the beliefs, rituals, and faith of the Safavid period. Those metal objects that have Quranic verses have a special use, and they are generally used for religious purposes. The content of the verses used, above all, has determined the volume and practical importance of the verse; the artist, therefore, has mostly used the small chapters of the 30th part of the Quran, Ayat al-Korsi, and short verses that have a message in them. The contents of the present article have been collected by library methods; it has been prepared based on documents and in a descriptive-analytical and comparative way. In*

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this article, only a limited number of objects have been examined, which have received more attention than the decorative aspect.

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Introduction

The Safavid period has been one of the best and most brilliant artistic and historical periods of post-Islamic Iran. Innovations and various techniques in engraving on metal objects have reached a point that the objects of this period have placed to be the most unique in the history of Iran. Artists in this era, using their inherent genius, artistic taste, and inspiration from the elements of their time, with beautiful and delicate engravings, carving metal surfaces, turned them into a painting full of motifs and drawings. In such a way that the presence of beautiful arabesque and angelica motifs, bergamot and beautiful inscriptions of Nastaliq, etc., both symbolically used and in symbolic language, kept pace with the social conditions of the time so that they could express the characteristics of art, society, and religious beliefs. The art of metalworking in the Safavid period is one of the most important factors for identifying the culture and art that can be examined.

For the beautiful and symbolic art of the Safavid period, considering the religious beliefs of that era (Shiite) and the common beliefs in society also we cannot give a purely decorative identity¹. Given the use of motifs with the function and symbol of the Shiite religion, also esoteric meanings can be considered for this art. Techniques in the art of metalworking of this period have peaked, and designs have changed. The motifs have become more subtle and dynamic at this time, and simultaneously with this change, there is a change in the concepts. In the Safavid period, Islamic mysticism has had a great impact on the art of metalworking, and especially on the use and concepts of motifs, so that they were full of symbolic meanings. Given their philosophical roots and the origin of common intellectual foundations in that period, these concepts can be profoundly studied. Not to mention, the history of metalworking art in this period, which has a very high value, was not a new phenomenon related to the emergence of this dynasty, but in terms of form and executive items, it was a continuation of the same traditions before, namely the metalworking of the Mongols and the Timurids. Safavid artists abandoned part of the Mongol metalworking tradition and presented the rest in a new form.

“During his study, to date, Assadollah Soren Malekian Shirvani has reached three main conclusions about Safavid metal working: First, Safavid metalworking is a continuation of the heritage of the Timurid era, especially Khorasani. Second, during the reign of Shah Abbas I, there were two distinct

¹ Samad Parvin, Behrouz Afkhami, Elham Hendiani, *Investigating and analyzing the motifs of the Tombstones of the Ounar Cemetery*, 2020, p. 399.

schools of metalworking in Iran, one in Khorasan and the other in Azerbaijan. Third, one can find both Sufi and Shiite tendencies in the works of the Safavid period, and without revealing it, the Khorasan School had a great influence on the classical school of western Iran²". The art of metalworking in this period, with symbological approaches, has entered a new stage; in fact, the form and motif have a special relationship with each other, which are specific to this period. Another special feature of the period is the use of yellow copper metal, which has a higher luminosity than previous periods and is closer to golden color, and they have been used in many religious works³. Steelwork was also perfected during the Safavid period, and Jean Chardin, a French globetrotter of that period, admires metalworking artists and states: "They do engraving very well; particularly do cameo well"⁴.

Given the recognition of the Shiite and the manifestation of new beliefs in the Safavid period, the artists of this era began to innovate in metalworking, which has been used in both material and spiritual aspects. From a material point of view, the efforts of these artists can be related to production for daily life; from a spiritual point of view, to the provision of spiritual and doctrinal needs respectively. This work with a symbolic approach has been achieved in the Safavid period through decoration and the use of abstract motifs, as well as various types of calligraphy, including Nastaliq, traditional and religious motifs. This artistic endeavor is nurtured in the common culture and religion (Shiite), is formed under the influence of thoughts and ideas that govern society, and is known as the art of the Safavid period. An art that, in addition to manifesting artistic effects and using motifs, has also expressed a manifestation of Shiite religion and cultural-religious beliefs, as by exploring these topics, one can reach the concepts and meanings of motifs. The present research, accordingly, intends to study the relationship between motifs and concepts while examining motifs and their concepts. It intends to examine the concepts and meanings associated with them and to answer the following questions. Questions such as, what are the meanings of religious motifs in the Safavid period? Did religious motifs increase during the Safavid period? Has the Shiite religion influenced these motifs?

Regarding the research background of metalworking in the Safavid period, it can be said that Malekian Shirvani has stated in his research that "Inscriptions on metal objects are one of the main pillars of ornaments, and inscriptions are one of the most important components of historical records

² Assadollah Soren, Malekian Shirvani, *Devotions & poems on Safavid bronzes in: Safavid art & architecture*, 1982, p. 25. ; Roger Sivari, *Safavid Iran*, 2020, p. 146.

³ Alireza Varvazitalab, Mohammad Afrogh, *Examining the form, decorating the content in the metalworking art of the Seljuk and Safavid eras*, 2010, p. 115.

⁴ Arthur Upham Pope, Phyllis Ackerman, *A Survey of Persian Art*, 1938, p. 2909.

along with metal objects such as coins, candlesticks, ware, etc.” With the advent of Safavid power, inscriptions with the theme of Shiite militancy appeared on metal objects. These inscriptions have been expressed with themes such as prayer and appeal to God through the names of the Twelve Imams or often the Fourteen Infallibles, mentioning Nad-e Ali with the name of Imam Ali and sometimes poems in praise of Imam Ali with a lot of extremism⁵. The research “Interaction of form and content in metal Kashkuls of the Safavid and Qajar eras,” which was conducted on 34 Kashkuls of these periods, have been answered the questions on the appearance form, decorative elements, calligraphic inscriptions used on these Kashkuls, dervish customs, and religious beliefs. In another study that examined the form and decoration of metal bowls of the Safavid period, 23 samples of images on Safavid metal bowls in domestic and foreign museums and personal collections have been examined in the form of library research. The results of the research showed that Safavid metalworkers, in creating their works, apart from being functional, have always considered decoration, Shiite culture, and religion. “Art-loving, the artistry of the kings, the self-awareness, and the deep artistic understanding of the artists, have made changes in terms of the beauty and elegance of form and motif in the metal objects of this era; this has led to the prosperity of metalworking art in that period”⁶.

In the research “Art of Islamic Studies”, which has studied the form, decoration, and content in the metalworking art of the Seljuk and Safavid eras to recognize the type of influence of religious elements on metal objects of the Seljuk and Safavid eras, it is stated that Iranian works of art, including the art of metalworking, there has been a reflection of rituals and religious ideas as well as views throughout the various centuries of history⁷. In the meantime, due to the different types of Sunni and Shiite religious tendencies, the metal objects of the Seljuk and Safavid dynasties, the golden age dynasties of Iranian art that established independent and unified governments in this land, are very important. In addition to common cultural and artistic features, there are many differences, including the use of geometric, plant, and animal decorations. Techniques used to apply materials, the content of the objects, and the use of calligraphy in Arabic script in the Seljuk period, Persian script in the Safavid period, and the type of use of the objects are shown⁸. Research has shown that with the coming to power of the Safavid government, the religion, and ideology of ruling Iran changed. Along with this religious change, the forgotten identity of the Iranians was revived after

⁵ Assadollah Soren, Malekian Shirvani, *op. cit.*, p.30.

⁶ Kobra Azarmdel, Ali Vand Shoari, *A study of the form and decorations of metal bowls of the Safavid period*, 2016, p. 5.

⁷ Samad Parvin, Habib Shahbazi Shiran, Maryam Mastalizadeh, *The themes of metalworking in the Saljuqid period vis-à-vis Khorasan and Mosul schools*, 2019.

⁸ Alireza Varvazitalab, Mohammad Afrogh, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

about nine centuries, from the fall of the Sassanids to the coming to power of the Safavids, with an Islamic color and smell. At this time, the traditional artists of the Safavid society, especially the metalworkers, also showed the signs and symbols of the Shiite religion and national and Iranian identity in their works and handicrafts.

In research with the aim of “adjusting, explaining and interpreting the themes of Quranic inscriptions by the use of Safavid and Qajar metal objects and the relationship between Quranic inscriptions in terms of content with metal objects of Safavid and Qajar period eras, Islamic art is seen in various forms and contents in the art of metalworking in Iran. One of them is the Quranic inscriptions various scripts of Kufic, Thuluth, Naskh, etc., whose visual beauty along with its spiritual and mystical atmosphere contains valuable messages for the owner of the object and its visitors in different eras⁹.

“Inscriptions on metals in the Safavid period, in fact, are the creation of an understanding between art and the Shiite religion, which can be traced to the artistic and spiritual genius of the Iranians and can be seen in the remnants of historical periods. With the spread of Persian script and language, the strengthening of Shiism and Iranian nationality, metalworkers engraved all kinds of inscriptions on most metal objects with Persian poems, in Naskh and most of all in Nastaliq”¹⁰.

Research Methods

The research method in the present article is descriptive-analytical, and information is collected in a library, in accordance with a documentary manner. Given the low quality of some images, there have also been used the virtual databases of museums, some sites, articles published on scientific sites, and books related to the identification of motifs. The statistical community of interest in the article is represented by the significant and authoritative objects that were made in the Safavid period and are currently kept in museums and private collections around the world.

Safavid Metalworking

The Safavid reign was a religious one, and the lineage of Shah Ismail and his successors went back to Imam Ali ibnAbiTalib; they claimed the guardianship of the Shiite Imams. The Shiite religion, which in previous periods had scattered bases in Iran, became the official religion of the Safavid reign; then, by separating itself from its Sunni neighbors, Iran had a kind of

⁹ Majid Sarikhani, *An analytical study on the effects of Quranic verses on the metalworking of Iran in the Safavid & Qajar eras with reference to the metal works of the National Museum of Iran*, 2014, p. 160.

¹⁰ Asghar Javani, Mehdi Motie, Habibollah Kazemnexhad, *A Study of Safavid Religious Metal Decorations*, 2012, p.26.

national identity that has continued to this day. Safavid kings encouraged artists and craftsmen; during the reign of these kings all the arts reached their peak of prosperity, and metalworking, which is one of the most important branches of art in the Safavid era, progressed like other industries. The skill and genius of the artists in this art, which is based on the old traditions and skills of metalworkers of this period, can be seen well¹¹.

The important point of this period is that the use of calligraphy reached its peak in all arts, especially in metalworking, and one of the innovations of the Safavid in metalworking was the use of Persian calligraphy and inscriptions as well as the relative disappearance of Arabic writings. The Safavid period (907-1148 AH) is one of the glorious periods of Iranian art, whose decorations became more free and simple. Also the arts of weaving, pottery, gilding, painting, metalworking flourished in this period, which The Safavid period can be called the golden age of Iranian art¹².

The making of brass wine containers with spherical bodies and cylindrical tubes of silver and gold plating, which was one of the conventional works of the Timurid period, continued in the early Safavid period. Safavid metal objects are decorated with inscriptions in Naskh, Nastaliq, Thuluth, and flower, as well as plant volutes. Sculptural and animal motifs, additionally, have been used in this period. Engraving of animal motifs also continued on metalware in western Iran during the reign of Shah Abbas I, with an extreme variety of styles¹³.

The expression of mystical and religious themes in the Safavid period using calligraphy on metals became more widely used, so that the subjects of the writings of wine goblets and other metalware were reflected in the mystical poems of great classical poets such as Hafez and Saadi. These mystical poems are abundantly seen in the inscriptions of metalware.

The choice of mystical poems for candlesticks and the like was also natural, because the metaphor of the butterfly circling the candle to achieve unity, to perish in its flame, had long been part of the stereotyped and repetitive allegories of mystical poems¹⁴.

The text of the inscriptions and their bodies were decorated with plant motifs and devotions, since Iranian art, especially Safavid art, was based on Shiite ornaments and religion. It seems that the reason was to provide a softer context for the epigraphs. In metalworking, these inscriptions, in combination with arabesque and angelica, were used more than ever and were engraved in the form of serrated bass strips around the ware. The art of calligraphy, which has been used in combination with plant

¹¹ Eric Schroeder, Arthur Upham Pope, Phyllis Ackerman, *Masterpieces of Iranian Art*, 2002, p. 148.

¹² Sheila Kanbi, *Safavid Art and Architecture*, 2009, p. 39.

¹³ Assadollah Soren, Malekian Shirvani, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹⁴ Roger Sivari, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

motifs in the form of inscriptions on the metals of this period, in addition to the decorative role, has manifested the Islamic spirit in works of art. In this regard, it is stated: "since calligraphy is a manifestation of the human heart and soul, so the rules that govern the soul also apply to calligraphy, and thus calligraphy has played an important role in expressing an artist's religious feelings and beliefs"¹⁵. In the Safavid period, Muslim artists used fewer human and animal elements; in their works, more plant motifs and inscriptions (in Naskh and Nastaliq) inspired by Shiite and mystical themes can be seen. This has made art more prominent in this period than in other ones. Generally, there is a proportion and harmony between the poems and the inscriptions of the ware, and the type of consumption of the objects. The artists of the period also considered the current spiritual values in the period by decorating the surface of the ware; in addition to material value, they have also given spiritual value to ware.

Religious Themes and Symbols in Samples of Safavid Metalworking

Bowl

The design form of bowls, in the Safavid period, was according to the type of their use. The general form of these bowls follows the type of their function, which is based on two categories: stemware and flatware, which have different forms. These forms have surfaces that, like paper pages, have become an arena for expressing words and images. In other words, while preserving the features as their function, they have become an arena for expression. The motifs and decorations on the surface of the ware have become eligible according to the common and religious beliefs of the Shiites in the Safavid period, and the motifs have a symbolic reading.

The beautiful motifs of the body of these ware are not only united by the composition, but also their semantic sharing is conveyed to the viewer through the motifs and visually. Shiite religious thoughts and common Sufi thoughts of the Safavid period are somehow manifested in the motifs of each of this ware, and their decorations, largely, are derived from the thoughts and beliefs of the time of the production. Regarding the inward meanings of Iranian miniatures, Titus Burckhardt believes that its special mystical quality [miniatures] is influenced by the atmosphere of Shiite Iran¹⁶. (Fig. 1 - 5)

The form and body of some Safavid bowls are not two-part and are skew. Continuous lines divide the surface into regions, each of which contains a single form. The narrow strip between the inscription and its body better shows the height of the inscription. From the repetition of single forms

¹⁵ Mohammad Madadpour, *Manifestations of spiritual wisdom in Islamic art*, 1996, p. 178.

¹⁶ Titus Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufism*, 1996, p.100.

with a common central point, radial motifs are created that can be seen around the foot of all bowls.



Fig. 1. Copper Bowl, 1078 – 1678, Height: 10.95-11, Width: 26.65-27.75



Fig. 2. Food Bowl, West of Iran, Isfahan(?) 17th C. AD

The intersection of all radial lines is the point around which all the structural lines of the design revolve. The inscription, which is about one-third the height of the container, emphasizes the height of the edge of the container. On the body of this container, arabesque motifs that have been executed by the symmetry method, from the arabesque joint and in combination with angelica design, emphasize the symmetry of the container's body. Seeing each part, the viewer's gaze is transferred to another part, and this transfer from one part to another creates a kind of movement.

The bowls are combined with Fourteen Infallible inscriptions and their edges have delicate arabesque motifs. The horizontal line in the middle of the container is exactly where the height of the container divides into two equal parts.



Fig. 3. Part of the Inscription on the Edge of the Bowl



Fig. 4. Copper Bowl, 16th C. AD



Fig. 5. Bowl, 16th & Early 17th C., Copper Casting with Carvings, Height: 9.5 cm, Width: 24 cm, British Museum

The Text of the Inscriptions

The text of this type of inscriptions is as follows:

«اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى الْمَصْطَفَى مُحَمَّدَ ، وَ الْمُرْتَضَى عَلِيَّ ، وَ النَّبُوْلَ فَاطِمَةَ ، وَ السَّبْطَيْنِ الْحَسَنَ وَ الْحُسَيْنَ ، وَ صَلِّ عَلَى زَيْنِ الْعَبَادِ عَلِيِّ ، وَ الْبَاقِرِ مُحَمَّدَ ، وَ الصَّادِقِ جَعْفَرَ ، وَ الْكَاطِمِ مُوسَى ، وَ الرِّضَا عَلِيَّ ، وَ النَّوْفِيِّ مُحَمَّدَ ، وَ النَّوْفِيِّ عَلِيَّ ، وَ الرَّكْبِيِّ الْعَسْكَرِيِّ الْحَسَنَ ، وَ صَلِّ عَلَى الْمَهْدِيِّ الْهَادِي صَاحِبِ الْعَصْرِ وَ الزَّمَانِ صَلَوَاتِ اللَّهِ وَ سَلَامُهُ عَلَيْهِ وَ عَلَيْهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ الْمَعْصُومِينَ
سنه»

“Peace be upon the Imams and the Fourteen Infallibles”

The edge of this ware is completely smooth and the inscription starts exactly from the edge, and its height is one-third of the height of the body. The theme of the inscription is a salute to the Fourteen Infallibles in the Nastaliq, and the content of this section is covered with very delicate helix arabesque and tiny angelica. The signature of the owner of the bowl can be seen in the motif, in the shape of a bergamot head on the edge of the bowl. An inscribed strip is separated from the body by a slightly raised horizontal line. There is a strip with arabesque and angelica motifs between the inscription and the body.

Goblets

“In different religions and sects, the goblet has had a ritual use, and the motifs on ancient goblets that reflect the beliefs of different ethnic groups make this use even more apparent.



Fig 6. Inside the Goblet

A goblet, dating to the fourth millennium BC, made in Susa and discovered there, with images of mountains, water, and an antelope (moon,

water, symbols of productivity and fertility, respectively) is one of them. In the Safavid period, goblets were usually made of brass, were used for special purposes, and were available to augurs, diviners for augury, and astrology. (Figs 6 - 9)



Fig. 7- a-1. The Outer Surface of the Goblet



Fig. 7- a – 2. Metal Patch (Keys)



Fig. 8. Forty-key Goblet, with A Short Edge Folded Outwards, with A Circular Foot, 1040 AH

In the decorations of the edge of the goblet of the Safavid period, there is a wide horizontal inscription with the theme of “salute to the Fourteen Infallibles” in the beautiful calligraphy of Nastaliq, which is located in the content of delicate arabesque motifs.



Fig. 9. Bismillah Forty - Keys Goblet or Augury and Divination Goblet (Moghaddam Museum)

From under the inscription to the foot part, the body of this goblet is decorated with fine and tangled inscriptions with Naskh script and it seems to be a devotion. On the edge of the ware, there are verses and salute to the Infallible Imams; behind them one can see verses of poetry, such as:

نَادِ عَلِيًّا مَظْهَرَ الْعَجَائِبِ تَجِدُهُ عَوْنًا لَكَ فِي النَّوَائِبِ

Call out to Ali, that he is the embodiment of strange traits

كُلُّ هَمٍّ وَعَمٍّ سَيَنْجَلِي بَوْلَايَتِكَ يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَلِيُّ يَا عَلِيُّ

Until the problems are solved, I swear by your greatness and I swear by your leadership, understand me with your hidden kindness
On the edge of the goblet, this prayer and support from Imam Ali was engraved, which was considered very useful and valuable.

From the bottom of the folded edge to the foot, the motifs on some goblets are decorated with five horizontal stripes and different motifs. The lower part of the folded edge of the dish has inscriptions and devotions in Naskh and fine form. In the inscription section, stretched bergamots are repeated one after the other and inside each of them, the name of one of the Imams is engraved in Naskh. On the side, these bergamots have small circular motifs that form a chain-shaped by curling in a row. On the wide strip of the ware, which occupies the most part, the twelve months of the year

(the twelve constellations) are placed inside the simple bergamot motifs. Among these motifs, devotions are engraved in Naskh and tangled lines as well. Geometric patterns are placed on the foot, horizontally and in a straight direction. The names of the Imams are engraved inside the stretched bergamots in the narrow strip at the bottom of the body. Inside the ware, the surah of Al-Fātīhah, Al-Kāfirūn, Al-Ikhlās, Al-Falaq, and An-Nās are engraved.

The outer surface of some of the other goblets of this period is decorated with an inscribed strip at the edge. Each part of this strip, which has the theme of salute the Fourteen Infallibles, is placed inside a simple bergamot. Among them, the heads of the bergamots are circular with a decorative role. At the body, the devotions are placed inside circles of equal size, at regular intervals, and connected by short horizontal lines. In the upper part, motifs similar to half-bergamot can be seen. The use of the names of religious leaders for the blessing of their names, and to show the interest of Muslims has been common and has found a special place in applied arts, such as metalworking.

Candlestick

The general form of columnar and tall candlesticks of the Safavid period is divided into three parts: base, body, and edge by two horizontal lines. These three parts are located around the central axis of the candlestick, which is perpendicular to the base reference line (base circle line), which is also a horizontal line. In contact with the center point of the base circle, this vertical line forms two perpendicular angles on either side of the candlestick, which causes the two parts to be symmetrical. The base consists of a large circle a few centimeters above the ground. There is a beautiful curvature from the part where the container is placed on the ground to the part that is attached to the body. This part consists of parallel and circular lines that are located around an axis, and towards the body, its diameter decreases. Necessary proportions have been observed in all parts of the candlesticks; if the form of each section is considered separately, they are compatible with each other, and this compatibility ultimately leads to coordination between them. The cylindrical and tall shape of the candlesticks of the Safavid period was a function of their function. The decorative motifs used on the candlesticks of this period, as well as their beautiful inscriptions, show the deep influence of Sufism, the common mystical thoughts, and teachings of that period. The influence of these thoughts has made the decorative motifs contain many esoteric meanings, as we discover their secrets with a symbolic reading¹⁷.

The three parts, the base, the body, and the edge of the candlesticks are composed of concentric circles. Concentric spheres are known as the

¹⁷ Titus Burckhardt, *op. cit.*, p.110.

strongest and most effective symbol in the stages of the universe, which one must go beyond to achieve absolute existence¹⁸. Given the fact that the circle is a symbol of human individual evolution and is considered the origin of existence and the symbol of the essence of God (according to the doctrines of the Sufis who believe in the Sufi stages of attaining the essence of God), perhaps these circles can be considered as a symbol of the Sufi world, the path and behavior of the Sufis on the way to the origin of God. Inscriptions, a symbol of Islamic calligraphy and Nastaliq calligraphy that became popular during this period, are a symbol of Shiism and Shiite mysticism. Poetic inscriptions on candlesticks also originate from the same thoughts and express the mystical aspects of Sufism. These Persian poems, which are mostly about candles and butterflies and the mystic's love for God, are the metaphor of the butterfly circling the candle, the suffering of the mystic, and a symbol of achieving unity and perishing in the essence of God¹⁹.



Fig. 10. Brass Candlestick, 16th C., **Fig. 11.** Brass Candlestick, 17th C.
Height: 31.4, St. Louis Museum of Art

Man lives in the Islamic society according to the canon rules. The relationship between Truth, Doctrine, and Canon can be shown in the best way possible by the symbol of the circle. The circumference is likened to the

¹⁸ Sayed Hussain Nasr, *The Doctrines of the Sufis*, 2014, p. 56.

¹⁹ Ayatollahi, Habib, *Theoretical Foundations of Visual Arts*, 1998, p. 176.

doctrine, the radii that connect to the center are the canon, and the centre of the circle represents the truth. This study begins with the radii. Although, it must be borne in mind that these radii are located between the canon and the truth, so without the circumference, there will be no canon, and without the centre, there will be no truth²⁰.



Fig. 12. Inscription & Arabesque Motifs on the Edge of the Candlestick

Conclusion

The results showed that there is a close relationship between the form and the motif of containers; thus, in a way, the motif is a function of the form and the location of each motif on the body of the container changes according to its form. The location of the inscriptions, for example, is usually on the edges of the wares, which has a special effect in a composition with plant motifs (arabesque and angelica). The Nastaliq, for this purpose, was most used in the Safavid period, and this was involved in the division of the surface of the wares. Therefore, one of the factors that have led to the success of the design of these objects is the fit of the edge margin, body text, text, and components within it. Bowl-shaped wares are usually inside-centre, and in all of them the height and width of the inscriptions correspond to the height, as

²⁰ Ardalan Nader, Laleh Bakhtiar, *Sense of Unity, Mystical Tradition in Iranian Architecture*, Translated by Hamid Shahrokh, 2001, p. 5.

well as width of the wares. In some works of art of this period, shapes and motifs have also influenced the main structure of objects, consequently, the decorations conform to the form. For example, round and scroll shapes are more in line with the circular shape of objects.

In bowls, the “line” connects the various parts of the forms and motifs. Since the straight line is uniform, it creates a sense of parity. Various types of tangible lines in these compositions that are created through the form of placing patterns together visually induce a sense of parity and the symmetry of the motifs are very effective in creating this sense. Generally, it can be said about these objects that their motifs are in perfect harmony with the form. In the case of these objects, generally, it can be said that their motifs are perfectly in harmony with the form; in a sense, that the designs have the same visual impact that the forms have on the audience.

Studies show that in the Safavid period the Shiite religion did not annihilate the previous mystical thoughts by entering Iran, but coexisted with them. There has been a close connection between art and spiritual customs derived from religion in this period, and the Shiite religion is one of the most influential factors in the art of this period, especially metalworking, just as metalworking has been a language for expressing religious, mystical thoughts and the manifestation of God. The spread of the Shiite religion and its path to all the dignity of people's lives has been revealed in the form and decoration of this art. The form and the content in the bowls and candlesticks of this period are perfectly proportional, as the symmetrical forms have complied with the function of the design and follow the content. In the works of this period, the content is conveyed by the motifs, so that the artist has expressed the mystical content derived from the visual elements of the motif through visual language. The containers studied in this period are subject to the traditional rules and regulations governing metalworking and, at the same time, reveal the needs and inner thoughts of the artist. Since the Safavid metalwork artist was under the doctrines of Islam, especially Shiism, Shiite themes in the form of decorative motifs has expressed spiritual concepts by the principles of aesthetics. In these works, the relationship between form and motif is reciprocal, as the motif has been a function of the form, and, at the same time, the motif is effective in emphasizing the form. Generally, there is a dynamic unity and diversity in these wares and each part of their form and motif can complement another. The motifs, which have given a deep spirituality to the art of metalworking by using Shiite themes (Shiite symbols), are in a common sense. They are united in terms of semantic commonality and by means of combination. This common concept is the same as achieving unity from plurality. This transcendental truth is manifested in “harmony,” “parity” and “unity” and is visible in the motifs.

The prevalence of Shiism and motifs in this period had a reciprocal effect. The motifs with their deep mystical concepts have both been

influenced by Shiism and helped to spread Shiism by influencing people's lives. Artists used motifs that were rich in spiritual concepts in order to express and convey spiritual values so that these motifs, which were in line with people's beliefs, could communicate with the viewer. This led the artists who followed soul purification to introduce spiritual etiquette into metalworking. Despite the use of inexpensive materials by the artists of this period, such as copper and bronze, and due to the spirituality which lies in itself (that originates from the esoteric truth of Islam), this art gained special value and became the manifestation of the presence of God. Generally, motifs and forms have one thing in common, and that is to achieve unity and manifestation of divinity. Although there are differences in form between candlesticks and bowls, as well as among the bowls themselves, on a more abstract level, they all seem to follow a single pattern that is a function of the Shiite and Sufi way of thinking of the time. For example, the use of writing is sacred, because it refers to the divine word. The most original Symbology factors of wares have been expressed in this research and the reason for distinguishing wares has been the difference in their form. However, all of them follow a common worldview or thinking in their principles.

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