

## Structural Analysis and Comparison of Concepts in Safavid and Contemporary Engraving Works

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### Introduction

In the Safavid period, the development of Islamic art and civilization is perceived in various fields. With the full support of Safavid kings that the artists of various fields enjoyed, Iranian productions quickly developed and reached European markets. In this era, one can perceive a renaissance occurring in theme creation by metalwork artists. In terms of aesthetics, Safavid calligraphy used rich performance skills that relied on the support of the art of illustration. Therefore, Iran's calligraphy during the Safavid era reached its peak of prosperity, even though it declined to a large extent during the Qajar era. The art of engraving has recently revived in the contemporary era so much so that an unprecedented flourishing of the art of engraving can be seen in all styles and on all kinds of metals. Due to the countless similarities of the cultural and religious context of Iran in these two historical periods, the examples of works of engraving of both periods have been studied in a specific frame. The purpose of this research is to find the structural similarities and structural differences of these works in an analytical approach.

### Research Method

The method of this research is a combination of historical, descriptive, comparative, and analytical. The method of gathering information includes library study (using the results of previously published articles) and field study (observation and interview). Like other Iranian works of art, the engraved works of the Safavid era are scattered in various museums all over the world. The samples studied in this research included works in Victoria and Albert Museum in London, in the Hermitage Museum in Russia, and in the Islamic-period section of Ancient Iran Museum. The existence of engraved works of the Safavid period was more in the above three museums, probably due to the broad transaction at time of the Safavid dynasty with the world, especially Europe. Also, the studied examples had superior artistic and visual values compared to production and market works in the same period. Contemporary samples also belong to the works presented to "Mesnegar Gallery of Tehran." Tehran "Mesnegar Gallery" was established in 1371 AH with the aim of presenting the prominent works of contemporary Iranian metalwork artists. This gallery displays the magnificent works of Iranian artists unique in the world. The artworks of this gallery have been

welcomed in exhibitions in Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan, Mexico, Argentina, Sweden, and Saudi Arabia. The features, distinguishing Mesnagar Gallery from other galleries and persuading us to choose this gallery as a statistical sample of this research, includes the following:

- 1) While following the authentic and traditional style of Iranian engraving, those artists who entered Mesnagar Gallery move on the border- line of tradition and modernism.
- 2) Mesnagar Gallery introduces famous Iranian artists by holding annual exhibitions.
- 3) In the sales expose of this gallery, Iranian collectors buy the works of artists and present and introduce them in art auctions abroad.
- 4) So far Mesnagar Gallery has directly or indirectly participated in tens of domestic and foreign exhibitions.

### **Research Findings**

From the analysis of research findings, it can be concluded that Safavid engravings have two principles of Shi'ism and nationalism from the point of view of the theme. First, the interaction of Nasta'liq calligraphy with Persian poems created metal objects ultimate elegance while indicating the existence of artists who were committed to the land of Iran and its historical traditions; second, the engraving art explained the religious principles of the Shia by using lines of Naskh and Suls, which added to the religious weight of these works. The existence of the inscriptions of Quranic verses in the contemporary era, influenced by the government's emphasis on the unity of religions, describes Islamic themes. Shia themes are less visible in the contemporary engraving works. On the other hand, the Safavid engraving has contained Shia themes by the repeated use of the great salutations (Salawat Kabira) and Nad Ali's prayer inscription on many works. Where the Safavid artisan artists repeatedly engraved religious inscriptions on the cash-pot (in order to bless and earn a halal livelihood), a deep semantic connection can be seen between the application and the theme. The Safavid metalwork artists made the necessities of daily life in various forms of metal and, then, engraved them. This occurred despite the fact that the contemporary works have a decorative aspect. In fact, in the Safavid period, "engraving" was a kind of decoration technique that served the artisan. It was form and content characteristics and showed the unique art and literary knowledge of its creators. However, the matter in the modern period is to recreate the precious "engraving" art regardless of its use. The contemporary artist uses his ability on traditional forms gracefully only in order to revive this art. Contemporary examples have only a decorative aspect. Contemporary artists have sought less to bring these objects into people's lives. Rather, the focus has been on more skillful repetitions. In the contemporary period, there is not much semantic connection between the creation of themes and the use of art objects. The visualization of heaven and the use of abstract themes are favorite subjects of contemporary engraving artists. The contemporary engravings through nature painting, scenography, hunting and battle scenes, and showing the daily life of ordinary people and the proletariat, create works inspired by Iranian painting of the Safavid era and the periods after that, which has also been affected by Western painting art. It seems that the engraving along with the flourishing and development of subjects in the art of Iranian painting, in addition to the significant image growth, has covered the body of Iranian metalwork with new implications. In both periods, there are a considerable number of works with Persian inscriptions, which have chosen the classical poems of Persian literature and the Nasta'liq script.

### **Conclusion**

The Safavid engraving works were committed to the Shia matter in the frequent use of the Nasta'liq script for Persian poems and in the use of the Suls and Naskh scripts for verses, supplications, names of imams, and great salutations. These works have been completely practical. The contemporary engravings thorough nature painting, scenography, hunting and battle scenes, showing the daily life of ordinary people and the proletariat, create works inspired by Iranian painting of the Safavid era and the periods after that. Literary and mystical themes are the pinnacle of engraving implication common in these two periods.

**Keywords:** engraving art, Safavid period, Iranian motifs, Shia's concept, contemporary art.