

Applied Arts of Iran during the Safavid Era based on Chardin's Travelogue

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Introduction

The Safavid dynasty represents a pinnacle of artistic brilliance in Iranian history, a period meticulously documented in various historical sources. Alongside native Iranian chroniclers, European travelers, drawn by favorable political and economic conditions and the rulers' keen interest in arts, produced extensive travelogues. These accounts offer invaluable descriptions and perspectives on the diverse cultural and artistic productions of the time. These visitors—including merchants, missionaries, diplomats, scholars, and artists—arrived with a range of political, commercial, religious, and cultural objectives, leaving behind not only written records but also a rich corpus of visual materials that provide crucial information about the era's cultural and artistic output. Among these, the travelogue of Jean Chardin stands out as a particularly detailed resource. This research aims to systematically extract, classify, and analyze information regarding the applied arts of the Safavid period, with a specific emphasis on Chardin's comprehensive account, to supplement existing historical knowledge. The primary research questions are: 1) how can the applied arts of the Safavid era be identified and enumerated based on Chardin's travelogue? and 2) how can these artistic productions be categorized based on the information within his work?

Research Method

This study is classified as fundamental and theoretical in its objectives. The research design is descriptive-analytic, and it utilizes a qualitative method for data analysis. The necessity for this approach stems from the fact that many applied art artifacts are perishable, which has damaged the historical record and created challenges for research; therefore, complementary methods are required to reconstruct historical knowledge.

Data collection for the historical and theoretical portions was conducted using library and documentary methods. The core analytical process is a qualitative content analysis that focuses on cultural and artistic themes to extract and systematize data embedded within the descriptive layers of the text. This process unfolds in several distinct stages; first is source selection. The initial step involves the precise identification of credible historical books. Sources are chosen based on their informational capabilities and the qualitative and quantitative abundance of specialized vocabulary to ensure the accurate extraction of relevant information. Second is data extraction and classification. Once a source like Chardin's travelogue is selected, the researcher proceeds to extract and classify specialized vocabulary related to cultural and artistic production. Third stage deals with a qualitative analysis. The analysis of the textual data is performed qualitatively. This involves the mental interpretation of the text's content; it employs systematic processes of classification, coding, and designing of recognized patterns to understand the data. The extracted

content is then analyzed based on a predetermined model. The last stage is contextual examination. The extracted vocabulary and information are not treated in isolation. Instead, they are analyzed within the rich context of the surrounding narrative. The analysis specifically examines descriptive passages including: A) descriptions of events, incidents, and prominent spaces and places; B) accounts of cultural and economic activities; C) detailed descriptions of the arrangements for important courtly ceremonies; D) inventories of property and lists of household furniture and effects; E) accounts of courtly protocols and lists of gifts, and F) descriptions of the interior and exterior decorations of various locations.

This comprehensive analytical method allows for a deep, interpretive understanding of the data embedded within the historical narrative, enabling the systematic identification and classification of the applied arts of the Safavid period.

Research Findings

The study of applied arts from historical periods is often hindered by the perishable nature of the artifacts, which leads to significant gaps in the historical record. Consequently, researchers must utilize parallel and complementary methods to reconstruct a comprehensive picture. This involves carefully selecting historical sources based on their reliability, the richness of their specialized vocabulary, and the quality of their information. Chardin's travelogue was identified as a prime source due to its remarkable level of detail, which extends beyond mere historical events to include the minutiae of the surrounding scenes and settings.

The analysis confirms that Chardin's work is an invaluable resource for understanding the material culture of the Safavid era. His detailed observations—covering everything from court ceremonies and gift inventories to production workshops and export goods—provide a rich dataset on the applied arts of the period. The research demonstrates that historical information about applied arts is often found scattered in indirect sources such as tax records, lists of war spoils, inventories of assets, and descriptions of courtly life. Chardin's narrative, with its wide array of observations, serves as a comprehensive repository for such data. By systematically extracting and analyzing specialized terms related to artistic production, this study successfully identified and categorized a wide range of applied arts.

Conclusion

This research confirms that Jean Chardin's travelogue possesses significant analytical potential for rediscovering the overt and subtle dimensions of Safavid applied arts, owing to its detailed descriptive structure. Employing a qualitative content analysis focusing on cultural and artistic themes, the study systematically extracted and organized data embedded within the text's descriptive layers. Chardin's focus on ancillary details and everyday scenes elevates his work beyond a simple historical narrative, establishing it as a foundational source for understanding the structure of cultural and artistic production in the Safavid period.

The findings have culminated in a nine-part classification system for Safavid applied arts, encompassing: 1) apparel, 2) textiles, 3) floor coverings, 4) vessels, 5) functional decorations, 6) epigraphy, 7) jewelry, 8) architectural decorations, and 9) other productions. The most extensive data were concentrated in the categories of textiles, vessels, functional decorations, and floor coverings. Furthermore, the analysis captured critical details regarding design motifs, color palettes, raw materials, and production techniques mentioned in the source. This comprehensive approach not only facilitates a precise classification of the objects but also leads to a more holistic understanding of the structure and characteristics of applied arts during the Safavid dynasty.

Keywords: Safavid era, Chardin, Applied arts, Travelogue.