

Gholamreza KARAMIAN* (PIASt, Poland / Azad University, Tehran, Iran)

Historical Metal works named Warsaw in Iran

<https://doi.org/10.34739/his.2020.09.15>

Abstract: *Since long times ago, the artists of Lorestan, have been earning their livelihood through making various types of handicraft a valuable art piece deeply rooted in the province's history called nickel silver crafts. In Farsi, varsho is actually the word 'War-saw'. What is the reason for such labeling of these works of art in the Qajar and Pahlavi periods in Iran? Lorestan artists in Borujerd town created such magnificent art at that time. We still don't know the reason for this naming, but one thing is clear, such metalwork is part of the history of art in both Poland and Iran.*

Key words: Borujerd, metalwork, War-saw, Iran, Poland

Introduction

This study deals with the author's survey on Polish and Iranian art in the early 20th century. The area of this study is Lorestan province in western Iran. Metal art works has 5000 years' background in Lorestan¹. At the end of the Qajar dynasty (1794 to 1925) and the beginning of the Pahlavi period (1925 to 1979), silver nickel was imported to Iran from Germany and Poland, which attracted the attention of metal manufacturers in Iran and many artifacts were produced at that time².

Nickel paktong (used in Eastern Jin Dynasty, 317-420 AD) was introduced to Europe after 18th century and called 'Chinese Silver'. In 1823, England and Germany copied it successfully³. This is a copper alloy, with the common formulation of 65%

* ORCID iD 0000-0003-4200-2592. karamianreza@yahoo.com; Polish Institute of Advanced Studies.

¹ B. OVERLAET, 'Luristan bronzes ii. chronology', *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2016, [available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/luristan-bronzes-ii-chronology> (accessed on 19.05.2016)]; F. BEGEMANN, E. HAERINCK, B. OVERLAET, S. SCHMITT-STRECKER, F. TALLON, 'An Archaeo-Metallurgical Study of the Early and Middle Bronze Age in Luristan, Iran', *Iranica Antiqua* 43, 2008, 1-66.

² Probably varsho-sazi as a technique started and developed in Dezful, Khuzestan Province, reached Borujerd in Lorestan the neighboring province and then spread out to other parts of the country in Qajar period.

³ A. GRANT, 'A British history of German silver: Part 1 - The discovery of nickel and development of nickel alloys, 1754-1823', *Journal of the Antique Metalware Society* 23, 2016, 58-79; T. DERUI, L. HAIPING, 'The ancient Chinese casting techniques', 2011 [Retrieved September 12, 2017, from www.foundryworld.com/uploadfile/201131449329893.pdf].

copper, 18% nickel and 17% zinc⁴. In addition to its silver color, this alloy was easy to cast and fabricate, was resistant to tarnishing, and was economical to produce. Varsho is actually the copper alloy known as ‘German silver’. In Farsi, varsho is actually the word ‘War-saw’. It is commonly believed that the alloy was imported from Poland for the first time, therefore it was named after the capital of this country.

Persian handicraft in fashion in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth

For almost three centuries (15th-18th centuries), Ottoman Turkey was a neighbor and a common enemy of Poland and Persia, which mainly gave a political character to the mutual relations of both countries. The second field of Polish-Persian contacts were trade and Catholic missions. The specific fashion for oriental items in Poland was probably influenced by the Sarmatism (the legend of Polish descent from Sarmatians). The fall of the Safavid dynasty in 1722 and later the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 ended the exchange of missions between the two countries. However, despite the changed political reality, the fashion for Persian items has not disappeared. One should agree with the interpretation of Paulina Banas, who writes: “The goods imported from Persia or made in Polish workshops in imitation of Persian designs, present a fusion of Polish and Persian elements and thus assisted the Poles in defining, expressing, and asserting nationality, identity, and social status”⁵.

Nickel silver artifacts of Lorestan, called Warsho (Warsaw)

Since long times ago, the artists of Lorestan, the city of Borujerd in particular, making the valuable art piece deeply rooted in the province’s history: nickel silver crafts. The craft used to be among most profitable careers in Borujerd. It made up a large part of old business in the region, to the point that Borujerd’s name is associated with nickel silver crafts. There are various accounts of the history of this type of craft in Iran. One historical account says that a small number of Iranian blacksmiths from Isfahan, Borujerd, Dezful and many other cities were sent to Russia to learn the art.

The artists of Borujerd used the sheets to make the basic items for an ordinary life (dining dishes, samovar, sugar dish, caddy); and came to be known as inkwell

⁴ A. GRANT, ‘A British history of ‘German silver’: part II: 1829-1924’, *Journal of the Antique Metalware Society* 24, 2017, 48.

⁵ P. BANAS, ‘Persian and Polish Sashes: Symbols of National Identity and Luxury Textiles in an International Market’ in *The Fascination of Persia: The Persian-European Dialogue in Seventeenth-century Art & Contemporary Art From Tehran*, ed. A. LANGER, Zurich 2013, 120.

makers because they were the first artists who made inkwell from nickel silver sheets. Nickel silver craft was registered as an intangible cultural heritage in march 2018⁶.

The artists of Borujerd create beautiful pieces of art by hammering and bending the nickel silver sheets. They use simple devices beside their own physical power. The metal sheets were cut with special scissors and the size of the cut depended on the size of the objects, the big pot or the small one, like a teapot or plate, and then use the furnace to heat them and prepare them for molding. The most important technique for forming a metal sheet was hammering which the quality of the work was based on the artist's experience. There was different kind of anvils for making different objects, skilled artists used hammers to form metal to the objects they desired, they used welding with brass metal when needed to insulate or attach different parts of the work.

Some of these products were simple ornamented and some were decorated with an ancient Persian engraving technique called 'Ghalam Zani' (the art of carving superb designs on various metals)⁷. Ostad Mehdi Pour was one the master of this art he worked between 1925-1960. He made master pieces of art for king of Iran Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi before Islamic revolution.

This skill requires some equipment such as a compass, various types of hammers and rods, bitumen, plaster and base, the metalwork must first be fixed to the base with the composition of bitumen and plaster, this will help the artist not to puncture the metal work during the hammering, in the other hand, process are more manageable when hammering, compass is required when the artist wants to find the center of the pots or circular bowls, the motif pattern to be placed on the screen is adjusted by the metalwork center for symmetrical balance. The master of this art in Borujerd was Mr. Malayeri.

Conclusion

Warsho in Persian language means Warsaw, Nickel silver crafts was coined as Warsho at Borujerd in Lorestan province and Iranian art terminology. As we know nickel silver not only imported from Poland but also from Germany. What is the reason for such labeling of these works of art in the Qajar and Pahlavi periods in Iran?

Lorestan artists created such magnificent art at that time. Whatever the reason for this naming, they chose the name Warsho (Warsaw). They decided to put the name of the Polish capital on their artworks. We still don't know the reason for this naming, But one thing is clear, such metalwork is part of the history of art in both Poland and Iran.

⁶ F. ASKARIEH, 'Nickel Silver Crafts; Traditional Art in Western Iran', [<https://ifpnews.com/nickel-silver-crafts-traditional-art-in-western-iran>; accessed on 15.05.2020].

⁷ IsfahanTimes 12. [http://www.isftimes.ir/sites/default/files/vijeh/2016/09/27/pdf/explore%201_0.pdf; accessed on 19.09.2020]

In the historical Bazar of Borujerd which architecture style survived from Safavids until Qajar periods, there has been a section in said bazar called Warsho Sazan means the people who made Warsho beside there is family name ‘Warshochi’ (people who made Warsho) in Lorestan and Iran which may concern to this profession.



Fig. 1. Mohammad Ali Karami 75 years old, Borujerd, 2013; photo courtesy Borujerd Cultural Heritage Organization



Fig. 2. Mashallah Ghabadi 73 years old, Borujerd, 2013; photo courtesy Borujerd Cultural Heritage Organization



Fig. 3. Mashallah Farrokhi 82 years old, Borujerd, 2013; photo courtesy Borujerd Cultural Heritage Organization



Fig. 4. Azizolah Shaddel 67 years old, Borujerd, 2013; photo courtesy Borujerd Cultural Heritage Organization

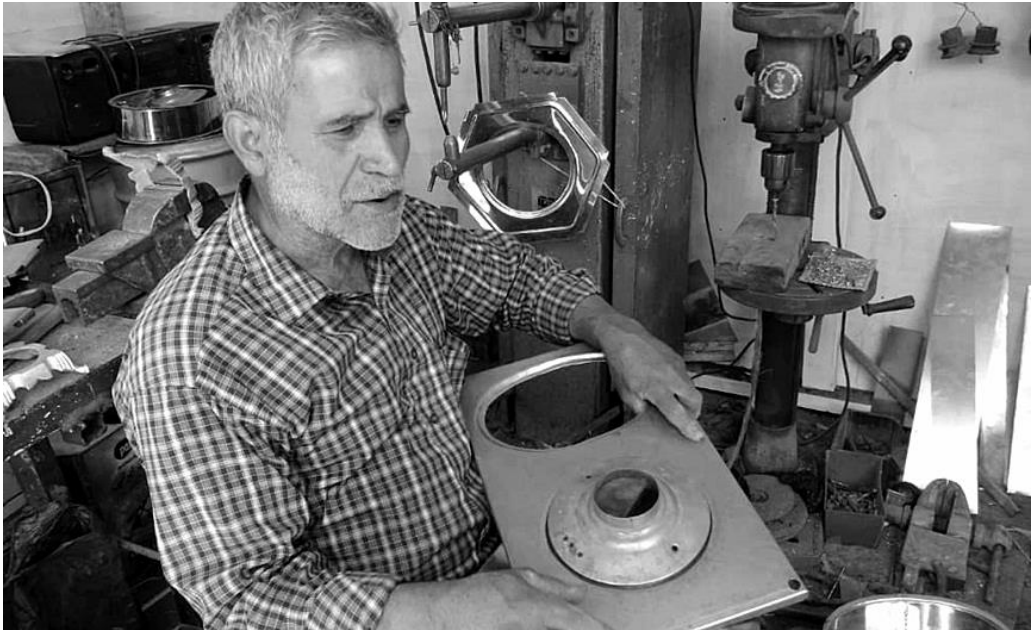


Fig. 5. Asad Abolzadeh 62 years old, Borujerd, 2013; photo courtesy Borujerd Cultural Heritage Organization



Fig. 6. Warsaw metal sheets formed by artists in cylindrical shape; photo by A. Moghaddam



Fig. 7. Amin Moghaddam's workshop, Borujerd, photos by R. Karamian and A. Moghaddam



Fig. 8. Amin Moghaddam's Workshop, Borujerd, photos by R. Karamian and A. Moghaddam



Fig. 9. Various types of hammers and rods for Ghalam Zani (engraving)



Fig. 10. Amin Moghaddam, new generation of Warsho Sazh, Borujerd 2019, photo by R. Karamian



Fig. 11. Masoud Farrokhi, Borujerd 2019, photo by A. Moghaddam



Fig. 12. Inkpot, 7 cm, made in Borujerd 1935, photo by A. Moghaddam



Fig. 12. Sugar dish made by artist called Shaddel in Borujerd, 1975, photo by A. Moghaddam



Fig. 13. Tea boxes made between 1940-1970 in Borujerd, photo by A. Moghaddam



Fig. 14. Breakfast set made in Borujerd 1970, photo by A. Moghaddam



Fig. 15. Samavar height 75cm,made by an artist named Habib Nodost in Borujered,1980, photo by A. Moghaddam



Fig. 16. Teapot, 23 cm height, made in Borujerd 1980, photo by A. Moghaddam



Fig. 17. Oven, samovar, tray, teapot, and water container, made in Borujerd 1960, photo courtesy Borujerd Cultural Heritage Organization