

# Hand fan of Bafq, a handicraft registered as an intangible cultural heritage

## Iranica Desk

A type of handheld fan (*baad bezan* in Persian) produced in Bafq, a city in central province of Yazd, has recently been registered on Iran's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. The fan, on which the name of its owner is woven, is a unique handicraft known as *Esmi Baad Bezan* in the country (*esm* means 'name' in Persian).

Nasser Babaei Nodoushan, an official from Yazd Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, said that the hand fans, made of date palm fiber, are produced in various parts of the country. "People of Yazd Province, which is a center of date production, have a special skill in production of this type of hand fan," he noted.

In the past, merchants of Bafq put this type of fan, on which their own names were woven, among commodities offered to their customers. The fans were known among the people as the symbol of Bafq.

Babaei Nodoushan added that the history of *Esmi Baad Bezan*, which is linked to *hasir-bafi* (mat-weaving), dates back several centuries, to even before the advent of Islam in Iran, pointing out that the images of the handheld fans can be seen in historical documents.

Bafq was registered as the "National City of Mat-Weaving" in the Iranian year to mid-March 2022. *Jaroo-bafi* (broom-weaving), *paadari-bafi* (doormat-weaving) and *tanaab-bafi* (rope-weaving) are among the other Bafq handicrafts, which are made from date palm fibers.

Mat-weaving, or *hasir-bafi*, which traces back to a thousand years ago, is a kind of handicraft that is created differently in each region by using various kinds of leaves.

People in Bafq have long been practicing the art of mat-weaving. As one of the most ancient handwoven arts produced in the Iranian Plateau, mats are made by integrating herbal fibers into each other.

Palm fibers should first be soaked in water in order or make the fibers soft and flexible.

What makes this product unique is the artistic taste of the weaver and the utilization of different pigments.

It is not known when and where the craft was first created. But archeologists have discovered traces of mat-weaving on plaster pieces that belong to six thousand years ago.

Bafq has been recognized as the "National City of Mat-Weaving" to honor all craftspeople of the city and help preserve the valuable traditional art.



## Yalan Dunes become hottest spot in Iran



IRNA

## Iranica Desk

Hadi Shahroudi, the spokesman of South Khorasan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, said that the Yalan Dunes have beaten the Lut Desert, becoming the hottest spot in Iran.

In June, 2022, the first time that ground temperature was recorded in Iran, the Lut Desert, which extends over three cities, and has been registered as the first natural heritage of Iran in UNESCO, was found to be the most sizzling spot in Iran.

What made this research different from NASA and international centers' previous reports, was the 24-hour supervision of the location.

"Based on recent investigations, the Lut Desert is no longer the hottest spot of the country, and our final research indicates that Yalan Dunes in Deh-e Salam village, is currently the hottest area in Iran," he said.

According to Shahroudi, the highest temperature in locations under supervision was recorded as 73.5° Celsius on July 17, at around noon.

"Registering the hottest spot of the country can be a source of tourist attraction, considering the fact that the Lut Desert also contains the tallest sand hills in the world, and in spite of the high temperatures, there is habitation nearby," he concluded.

## Development of Persian arts



A *lajvardina* star-shaped tile



A *minai* ceramic bowl

Apart from the creation of "miniature" painting, the western art historical canon was also applied for the taxonomy of Persian painting according to the "school." The painting school was often associated with a city or town, rather than the workshop managed by the master, due to the lack of information about named painters or masters in pre-modern Persian painting. This generated a certain bias towards periphery pictorial traditions.

Many Persian painting schools outside the main genealogical lines, such as the Shaybanids (1500-99) of Central Asia, the Aq Qoyunlu (1396-1508) of East Anatolia and West Persia, or the dynasties of the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1555), were for a long time overlooked; in some cases, these were categorized vaguely as the works of provincial schools under the more established dynastic names so as to justify their existence. By contrast, some

unusual features found in what was ought to be evocations of the "high school" of Persian painting, such as that of the Timurids and the Safavids, were rejected as non-Persian.

The same tendency can be said about the carpet — the bestselling cultural product of Persia. Realising its immense commercial value through western assessments, the carpet industry revived in late Qajar era, and the image of the "Persian" carpet steadily took shape. Silky carpets from courtly workshops began to be regarded as fine arts products, whereas roughly-woven rugs of Central Asian tribes were considered as ethnographical materials. Besides the aforementioned disciplines, namely art history and ethnography, archaeology also made a significant contribution to the shaping of our view towards Persian Islamic art.

Due to the theological aversion to burial rites, material

remains of Islamic Persia are mainly from urban sites, thus reflecting the life of not only the ruling class but also the working class. Such finds, especially ceramics, attracted little attention when they were initially discovered as sherds or fragments and mostly undecorated or uncoloured.

Far from this original context, however, examples of various mediaeval Persian fine wares, such as *minai* and *lajvardina*, with the perfect shape and vivid colour, began to appear in the western art market, and gradually lost much of their archaeological profiles.

Furthermore, the boom of Persian objects in the art market was, inevitably, linked to the growth of suspicious excavations and trading as well as the rise of fakes and forgeries of Persian objects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; the commercialization of Persian art had an unwelcome impact on the academia as well.

Finally, various 19th-century Eurocentric views to the art of the nonwestern world served to create a distorted, complicated timeline and hierarchy of Persian Islamic art. While the great mediaeval and post-mediaeval Islamic dynasties were viewed as equivalent to European Renaissance courts, modern Persian artistic production was almost deliberately excluded from the history of Persian art.

The objects of the latter were defined as the traditional crafts of Persia, although earlier examples of the same crafts acquired their honourable status as fine artworks.

The study of Qajar art made a significant advancement in the last few decades, partially rectifying this situation. Yet post-Safavid Persian art in general still remains bound to the category of Islamic or Middle Eastern art instead of the global discourse of modern art, and it continues to suffer from neglect.

The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter entitled, 'Why Persian art needs to be studied and collected', from a book entitled, 'The Shaping of Persian Art: Collections and Interpretations of the Art of Islamic Iran and Central Asia' edited by Yuka Kadoi and Iván Szántó, published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.