

# Shahiyun of Dezful center of kapu-weaving in Khuzestan Province



## Iranica Desk

In the local dialect, *kapu* refers to any spherical object, but as a craft, it describes hand-woven, basket-like spherical objects that may have lids, too. *Kapu* are crafted by the masterful hands of women, and all of its materials are naturally found in Khuzestan Province.

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism, Ezzatollah Zarghami, announced recently that the city of Dezful has been registered by the World Crafts Council (WCC) for its exceptional contributions to the world of traditional craftsmanship. Dezful earned distinction for its mastery of *kapu-bafi*.

The city of Shahiyun, located 37 kilometers from Dezful, in the southern province of Khuzestan, is the center of *kapu-bafi* (kapu-weaving) in the province and the country, said Alireza Zamani, the head of Dezful Islamic City Council, IRNA wrote. He said that the villages and small cities affiliated to Dezful, with a privileged position in the field of natural, historical and religious tourism, have a treasure of talents in handicraft production, saying that this potential should be explored and used in the best possible manner. Zamani said that over 90 percent of *kapus* are produced in the small workshops of Shahiyun, adding that paying attention to the

talents of locals and allocating an adequate budget to the city's handicraft production would help increase social satisfaction there and create reverse migration. Head of Dezful's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department Hamidreza Khadem said that a large part of Dezful's potential in the field of tourism and handicraft production has been left unattended. He noted that the new strategies adopted by Dezful's Islamic City Council is truly a golden opportunity, which should be used for the development of the city and its affiliated cities and villages. "The Cultural Heritage Organization is prepared to cooperate with other bodies to develop the city's

tourism and handicrafts sectors," he said. Khadem continued that the establishment of a *kapu* house by the city's municipality, with the aim of organizing the handicraft production, sale and exports, would be a fruitful step, which should be taken to make Shahiyun the hub of *kapu* production in the country. Presently, 10 *kapu*-weaving workshops are operating in Dezful, and its affiliated cities and villages, where 2,000 artists are working. With the originality, high quality and elegance of *kapu*, its production has created employment for a large number of people. It is categorized as a kind of mat-weaving done by

weaving leaflets of palm trees around a special kind of straw-like object called *kertak*, which is a wild plant that grows in swamps and tropical climates. The stem of *kertak* is very flexible. This feature helps increase the durability of *kapu*. During recent years, weavers have begun incorporating colorful wool in their products to add to their beauty. Palm tree leaflets that are selected to be woven as *kapu* are young and white because they have not been exposed to the sun for a long time. They are then soaked in water for a day. Since the core fibers of *kapu*, the *kertak*, are sensitive to humidity, they are best kept in dry conditions.



## A classification for development of Persian art

For a long time, historians of Persian art have adhered to a dynastic chronology. Such a classification has a certain justification, for after a large territory had been unified under the control of a single dynasty which then ruled for a century or more, a certain unity of style was in fact created in that state. But a more detailed study of objects and a precise determination of their dates have shown that periods of change in art do not always coincide with the emergence or fate of dynasties. In 1970, Ernst Grube, a German historian of Islamic art, suggested a new classification for the development of Persian art in the Middle Ages. He distinguished five periods from the appear-

ance of the Arabs to the beginning of the 18th century. The first three periods, in his opinion, were common to the whole area dominated by Islam. These are: The period of its establishment (650-850 CE), the first inter-regional style (850-1050 CE) and the second inter-regional style (1050-1350 CE). After this, in Grube's opinion, art in Islamic countries follows separate lines of development in different regions. As regards Iran, he considers it possible to distinguish two periods: The art of Central Asia and Iran between 1350 CE and 1550 CE and the art of Safavid Iran between 1550 CE and 1700 CE. Grube sketches only the most general outline of each period's characteristics

without supplying any details. This important work was written years ago and its ideas have not been further developed, as far as we know, either in studies by Grube or those of other authors. It seems to us, however, that the periodic chronology suggested by Grube is correct. In his research into Iranian metalwork of the 14th-18th centuries, Anatoli Ivanov has come to the same conclusions with regards to the two final periods. In Grube's classification, the second inter-regional style (1050-1350 CE) is the most interesting. In his opinion it arises in various centres of Central Asia and eastern Iran at the end of the 10th century, and reaches its full development towards the mid-11th

century. One of its chief distinguishing features is its attention to the depiction of people. During this period wall-painting becomes very widespread; its style probably originating in eastern Turkestan. Perhaps there was miniature painting in eastern Iran at the time, but no examples have survived. It is interesting that at this same period depictions of people appear in works of applied art too — in metalwork, ceramics and textiles — although this does not occur simultaneously in the various branches of art. In his study of 10th- and 11th-century silver vessels, Boris Marshak, an archaeologist and expert on Iranian and Central Asian metalwork, came to the conclusion that the early 11th

century formed a certain boundary in the development of art, at least in eastern Iran. He even managed to distinguish two schools of metalwork, based in Balkh-Tokharistan and Khorasan. In the late 10th and first half of the 11th centuries CE new phenomena were also observed in the manufacture of bronze (brass) ware in the eastern regions of Iran. This can be clearly seen in a group of six bowls of large dimensions and beautiful workmanship decorated with benedictory Arabic inscriptions and in a few cases signed by the craftsmen. It should be stressed that the very fact that at the end of the 10th and early 11th centuries signatures appear on works evidently attests to the growth of self-con-



A brass bowl from Iran, 14th century

sciousness amongst the craftsmen. This is the first signed bronzeware at present known on Iranian territory (one should also take into consideration a 10th-century ewer by the craftsman Bu Saeed). Later, during the pre-Mongol period, the number of signed items in-

creased. All the bowls in question are richly decorated with people, birds and beasts and the signs of the zodiac. A bowl from the Kevorkian Collection bears an engraved hunting scene with a crowned rider — a subject drawn from the Sassanid Period.