

# Craftsmen bringing lak-tarashi back to life

## Iranica Desk

*Lak-tarashi*, a unique form of wood carving, has been an integral part of the artistic heritage of Mazandaran Province for centuries. Skilled men and women have perfected their craft by using wood, logs, and branches to create stunning structures that seem to breathe life back into the lifeless wood. This beautiful and innovative art comes from the authentic industries of the people. The local villagers, living near the forests, have mastered the necessary skills to procure their tools and instruments from the forest wood and create exquisite works of art with their utmost talent and skill. Also known as *chutashi*, *lak-tarashi* requires more than just the skills of a carpenter or ordinary wood carver. The artisan involved in *lak-tarashi* combines their knowledge of wood and nature to create an unparalleled fusion of cultural and historical treasures.



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participate in occasional provincial and national exhibitions to promote their products. This lack of market access remains a significant challenge faced by artists in this industry, hindering their growth and potential success in the broader marketplace.

Kolvani noted that the popularity of wood industries is on the rise, but the scarcity of raw materials remains another critical obstacle. He believes that using high-quality, durable wood is essential in producing exquisite pieces that can withstand the test of time without harming the environment.

As someone who has dedicated his life to preserving this ancient craft, Kolvani expressed regret that many artists in the leather and wood industries have been forced to leave the country due to insufficient support.

He stressed that providing adequate support to artists and craftsmen will help reignite their hope and enable



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With a history of more than 8,000 or 11,000 years, *lak-tarashi* is an ancient art form. Master craftsmen in the past used the roots and trunks of forest trees, without the use of modern tools, to produce wooden vessels adorned with mythical patterns inspired by the surrounding nature, using tools such as chisels. Reviving this majestic art form is crucial for preserving the rich cultural heritage of Mazandaran Province. It is an opportunity to celebrate the skilled artisans and their contributions to the community while also promoting sustainable industries and tourism. For many years, the art of *lak-tarashi* was on the brink of extinction in Mazandaran Province. Only a handful of people continued to engage in this beautiful

art, cherishing their ancestors' profession by delicately carving wood within the corners of their homes. However, a shift has occurred among the younger generation, who recognize the disadvantages of plastic containers and materials. They have returned to the use of wood, which is both environmentally friendly and safe for humans. Among those dedicated to preserving this ancient craft, Maqsood Kolvani stands out as a renowned wood carver. With over 20 years of experience, he has honed his skills under the guidance of his father, passing down this treasured art form to fellow enthusiasts. His works range from intricately carved chests to intricately designed forks and water spinners, captivating audiences

at numerous handicraft exhibitions. When Kolvani immerses himself in the process of carving wood, it's as if he forgets the world around him. His skilled hands, guided by special tools, pour their creative energy into each masterpiece, driven solely by the desire to bring another piece of art to life. Today, he is esteemed as one of the greatest wood carvers in Mazandaran Province, specifically in Nowshahr.

In a recent interview with ISNA, Kolvani reflected on his journey, stating, "I learned this art from my father, a skilled wood carver, and I dedicated myself to its preservation so that this beautiful industry would not be forgotten. For the past 20 years I have been actively involved in this field." He expresses his gratitude for the support provided by Nowshahr's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicraft Department, along with other officials who have recognized the significance of reviving this precious art form. Thanks to Kolvani's efforts, the art of *lak-tarashi* has found new life, and several enthusiasts have successfully obtained licenses in this beautiful art and are actively practicing it. Together, they are working towards both preserving their cultural heritage and ensuring the continuity of this remarkable craft. Through the dedication of artists like Kolvani and the support of local authorities, the revival of *lak-tarashi* is becoming



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ing a reality in Mazandaran Province. This resurgence not only preserves a rich artistic tradition but also contributes to the promotion of sustainable industries, cultural tourism, and the overall well-being of the community. When we look at the hands of Kolvani, we can see the marks of wood carving tools etched on all his fingertips - a testament to his dedication to the art of *lak-tarashi*. Over the years, he has left behind a trail of stunning creations that have captivated audiences at numerous exhibitions. Despite his impressive body of work, Kolvani emphasizes the need for a permanent market serving handicraft artists. Unfortunately, Nowshahr lacks such a market, forcing artists to par-

them to continue pursuing their passion. The biggest desire of an artist is to sell and exhibit their creations.

In conclusion, Kolvani noted that negligence towards our craftsmen, particularly in the field of wood carving, which is experiencing a revival, will inevitably cause it to decline.

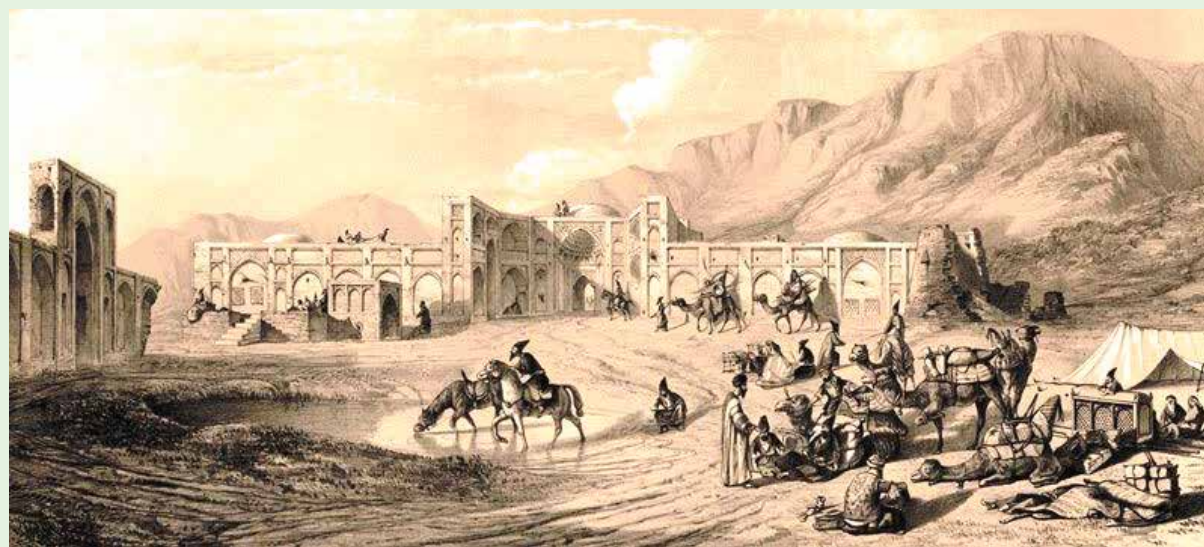
Delayed support will ultimately lead to the art being forgotten once more. Therefore, it is crucial to provide the necessary support to these talented individuals and ensure the survival of their craft, which carries not only cultural and historical significance, but also contributes to the promotion of sustainable industries, cultural tourism, and the overall improvement of society.

## Ancient road from Hamedan to Rey: Traversing history and culture

The ancient road from Hamedan to Rey (that is, from Ekbatana to Raga), coincided with the present road and passed through Zarand; the Arab geographers write about a roundabout way, via the town of Saveh.

The shortest route from Hamedan to Rey is reckoned to measure 49 farsakhs. Although this road crosses some mountains, no single pass presents serious obstacles to pack transport except for the 50 versts-long section between Kushkan and Mazdakan, which is sometimes blocked by snowdrifts, even to wheeled transport.

The roundabout way, according to the Arab geographers, was 61 farsakhs long. Noteworthy on this road was the village of Mashkuya, some eight farsakhs from Saveh and 15 farsakhs from Rey. Ibn Rusta, a tenth-century Muslim Persian explorer and geographer, mentions the existence, in this village, of an interesting palace of pre-Islamic date,



with figures carved from wood and a gift roof; the palace had a park with a spring

from which a stream issued and watered the neighboring fields. Between

Mashkuya and the next station, the road to Rey came to a river now called Ab-e

Shur; the road crossed it on a bridge made of brick, with arches; from this bridge one could see Mount Damavand. The "roundabout road" thus must have originated not because of some real obstacles on the main road but as a result of the importance of the city of Saveh; the district of Zarand, which lies on the main road, is subordinate to it even now. Here one of the roads to southern Persia branches off. In the political sense, Saveh was subordinate to Rey rather than to Hamedan; the customs-house of the ruler of Rey was located, somewhat further west of where the roads to Saveh and to Zarand bifurcated, a little distance east of the village of Pusta, which already existed at that time. Saveh was said to have been built in the Islamic period; it does not seem to have had great importance before the Ilkhans, although narratives about the Mongol conquest mention the burning of a rich library.

The above is a lightly edited version of chapter entitled 'Rey and Hamedan,' from a book entitled, 'An Historical Geography of Iran,' written by W. Barthold and published by Princeton University Press, Princeton.