

Revival of copperware craftsmanship in Zanjan

Iranica Desk

The continuity of handicrafts is deeply intertwined with the unwavering support extended to the dedicated artists striving to preserve these cherished traditions. In various parts of Zanjan, particularly within its central core, one can observe a diverse array of handicraft branches that are imbued with rich heritage and historical significance. Among these crafts, the art of copperware is currently experiencing a resurgence, despite having faced numerous historical challenges over the centuries.

The rich history of this handicraft dates back over a thousand years, tracing its origins to the Sassanid period, with significant advancements noted during the Seljuk era. Artisans of that time were renowned for crafting intricate copper basins, often adorned with mythical animal designs. These exquisite creations gained immense popularity among the newly settled Turkic tribes, as reported by IRNA. During the Ilkhanate period, the arrival of several Chinese artists—brought to Zanjan by Hulagu Khan—marked a pivotal evolution in the region's copper industry. Artisans produced prominent and intricately designed ewers and basins, embellishing them with floral motifs destined for export to China and across the Mediterranean region. Unfortunately, little remains of these antique copper ewers and basins, which signify a millennium of craft evolution in the city; most were lost to melting furnaces, resulting in the loss of invaluable historical artifacts.

Over the years, this revered craft has experienced numerous ups and downs, leading artists to occasional-

ly lose hope in sustaining their work, which risked fading into obscurity. However, the sound of copper artisans hammering their tools now resonates once more throughout the alleys and streets of Zanjan, signaling a revival of this authentic art form. Artists in the field firmly believe that it is imperative for authorities to provide more robust support at this crucial juncture to protect and preserve the craft, ensuring its transmission to future generations. Mohsen Salimi, the head of the Zanjan Copperworkers Union, reported that approximately 5,000 individuals are directly engaged in the copperware sector in Zanjan, with an additional 3,000 involved indirectly. He noted that the province produces an average of 15 tons of copper vessels daily. Salimi emphasized that the flourishing of the copperware and handicrafts sector has significantly alleviated unemployment rates, asserting that bolstering support for the province's handicrafts has spurred greater entrepreneurial activity within this industry.

In addition, Salimi pointed out that important strides have been made in enhancing the packaging of copper products, with ongoing initiatives focused on branding and cataloging efforts, including preparations to present each craft in three foreign languages to cater to international markets. Seyyed Mikael Mousavi, the deputy head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Zanjan Province, highlighted that over 16,000 people are currently engaged in the handicrafts sector across the province. He underscored that supporting handicraft artists and enhancing activities in this field is a top priority for the organization. Mousa-

vi also noted Zanjan's recognition as a World Craft City for Filigree by the World Crafts Council, emphasizing the diverse range of handicrafts available in the area.

He pointed out that traditional arts and handicrafts in Zanjan are esteemed for their antiquity, authenticity, economic significance, and cultural value. The deputy head further indicated that this vital sector not only has the potential to drive job creation but also complements the tourism industry, providing substantial employment opportunities with relatively low investment.

Currently, there are 299 branches of handicrafts across Iran, with 55 active in Zanjan Province. Prominent local crafts include filigree-making, *charoq-duzi* (a type of traditional shoe), knife-making, copperworking, engraving, and carpet-weaving. Mousavi noted that recent efforts have led to an improvement in the quality of packaging for the province's handicrafts. Additionally, he mentioned that initiatives are in place to increase the number of permits for operating packaging units particularly focused on handicrafts within the province.

The variety and diversity of handicraft products available in Zanjan have increased significantly compared to previous years. Despite this growth, exports of these items have encountered a decline for various reasons. Last year, total exports of handicrafts from the province were estimated at 413,000 officially and over 287,000 unofficially. Mousavi expressed optimism that these figures would trend upward in the future, reflecting the ongoing revival and increasing global appreciation for Zanjan's handicrafts.



IRNA



Jabalieh Dome, a marvel of Kerman's architectural heritage



YJC



Kerman, one of Iran's oldest cities, boasts a history that spans over four millennia. As a vital crossroads along the ancient Silk Road, Kerman has witnessed the rise and fall of numerous dynasties and empires, each leaving an indelible mark on the city's cultural and architectural landscape. The city features a variety of historical monuments, including mosques, bazaars, and forts, all reflecting the diverse influences that have shaped Kerman over the centuries. Among these historical treasures, the Jabalieh Dome stands out for its distinctive design and mysterious origins.

The Jabalieh Dome, also known as Gonbad-e Jabalieh, is a captivating and enigmatic monument located in Kerman.

Renowned for its unique architecture and rich history, this ancient structure

has fascinated historians, architects, and visitors for centuries. Set against the arid backdrop of southeastern Iran, the Jabalieh Dome provides an intriguing insight into the region's architectural achievements and cultural heritage.

The origins of the Jabalieh Dome are cloaked in mystery, with various theories and legends surrounding its construction. Although the exact date of its construction is unknown, historians believe the dome dates back to the early Islamic period, possibly between the 10th and 12th centuries. Some speculate that it may have been built during the Sassanian era, predating the advent of Islam in Iran, making it even older than previously thought.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Jabalieh Dome is its intended purpose. While some historians contend

that it was constructed as a Zoroastrian fire temple, others suggest it may have served as a mausoleum or commemorative monument. The absence of definitive historical records has only intensified the air of mystery surrounding the dome, fueling speculation and debate among scholars.

The Jabalieh Dome is an architectural marvel that showcases the ingenuity and craftsmanship of its builders. The structure is octagonal, with each side measuring approximately eight meters in length. The dome itself is constructed from a combination of stone and brick; the lower section is made from stone, while the upper portion consists of brick. This unusual use of materials in Persian architecture adds to the dome's uniqueness.

Rising to a height of approximately 20 meters, with a base diameter of around 18 meters, the dome sits atop a circular drum supported by its octagonal base. The transition from the octagonal base to the circular dome is achieved through the use of squinches, a characteristic feature of Persian architecture that facilitates the seamless transition between different geometric shapes. The Jabalieh Dome showcases a blend of architectural styles and influences, reflecting the diverse cultural and historical context in which it was constructed. The use of squinches, for example, is a hallmark of Islamic architecture, while the stone construction and octagonal base suggest influences from the Sassanid period. The dome's smooth curves and graceful proportions are reminiscent of early Islamic domes found throughout other regions of Iran.

