

THE USE OF WOOD ALONG THE SILK ROAD: THE CASE OF WOOD ART CRAFT IN SAMARKAND, UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract:

The art of wood carving in Uzbekistan is part of the Central Asian art heritage and its origins go back to ancient times. Wood carving is a very prominent skill in Uzbekistan. Every home has at least one wooden item decorated with carvings. Initially, wood carving was used to decorate wooden columns in Uzbekistan, which have been popular in construction in the East since ancient times. Later, they began to use it to decorate objects, starting from little boxes to carved tables. According to archaeological evidences, before the Arab invasion almost every house had an image of a deity, filigree carved from wood above their door. After the 10th century, Uzbek masters moved from the level of carving simple images to more complex ones, such as carving the images of landscapes and flora. Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva, Tashkent, Fergana were and remain recognized centers of wood carving. Each school has its own special carving technique and patterns. Sometimes just one glance at an object is enough to understand which school it belongs to. This paper exposes the secrets of the development of wood carving art in Uzbekistan starting from historical times to this day, distinguishing different woodcraft schools with their own style depending on their location, especially the school of Samarkand.

Key words: Silk Road; wood carving; art; Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

The peculiarity of this type of applied art of Uzbekistan is that wood carving masters made not only a variety of household products, but also participated in the creation of architectural samples - these are mainly carved wooden columns and doors. The most interesting examples of wood carving that have come down to us, created by masters of the leading centers - Tashkent, Khiva, Kokand, Samarkand and Bukhara, date back to the second half of the 19th - early 20th centuries.

Wood carvings from earlier periods have survived in the form of single specimens. These are, for example, carved doors from the 15th century. In the Guri Amir mausoleum and Ulugbek madrasah in Samarkand, a preserved door of the 17th century. In the Kukeldash madrasah in Bukhara, a carved column of 1616 in the Arab-khona mosque, and a carved door of the 18th century in Khorezm.

Numerous objects - chests, caskets, book stands - lauchs, musical instruments, low tables and attributes of throne decoration - were made from various types of wood. In this area, along with mass-produced products, genuine masterpieces of art were created.

Of the few objects on which the names and titles of the Timurids are inscribed, the objects of Ulugbek deserve special attention. The carved sandalwood box, which is currently one of the valuable exhibits in the treasury of the Topkapi Saray Museum, is of unsurpassed quality. The box was made in Central Asia at the beginning of the 15th century and is covered with a continuous carpet of floral arabesques, and the handles and locks are made of gold. The decoration of the box seems to merge the traditions of the ornamental style of the Muslim world and the motifs of Chinese themes popular in the Timurid empire. On the lid of the box, between two cards containing inscriptions with the title and name of Ulugbek, there is a medallion and an image of fantastic dragons.

Comparison of the decorative style of this box and other works of the 15th century. – carved doors from the Gur-i Amir mausoleum in Samarkand and Shamsiddin Kulal from Shakhrisabz, a fragment of a carved door from the Metropolitan Museum (Central Asia or Iran - 1450-1500), carved cenotaph of Taj al-Mulk Valad-din Abul-Kasim (Mazandaran, 1473) with carved wood ornamentation from the 14th century - shows a certain evolution of the style. The desire of craftsmen to create sophistication of the pattern and to fill the surface of the decorated products with it as much as possible is increasing. The ornament becomes more fractional and crushed. Decorated with carved wood from the 14th century. The plant ornamentation still retains a certain integrity. The master leaves planes unfilled with the pattern, and individual motifs of the ornament are emphasized by it. The decoration of the carved cenotaph from the mausoleum of Seifiddin Boharzi in Bukhara (14th century) uses the technique of an incised pattern, and the carved door to the mausoleum of Shamseddin Kulal (15th century) is made using a technique without background carvings.

In the second half of the 14th century, multifaceted decorative tables and stools, designed for the tastes of the European population of Central Asian cities, became widespread in Uzbekistan. By the end of the 14th - 20th centuries, masters used two main methods of artistic carving: a simple technique of decorating with a notched or incised pattern and complex carving without a background, created by

removing the background. The technique without background was available only to professional carvers and was considered a highly developed urban craft.

The basis of the carved ornament made in this technique is islimi - flexible, elastic-dynamic interlacing of plant shoots dotted with buds, flowers and leaves and pargori - a strict and static geometric pattern drawn using a compass and ruler. The widespread use of wooden carved columns, doors and other architectural elements is observed in the architecture of the capitals of the Uzbek khanates - Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand.

The end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries is also represented by a wide range of wooden household items. High multifaceted tables with characteristic features of the "oriental style", which were valued for their fine arabesque carvings and were intended for European interiors, became especially popular.

Khiva was one of the leading centers of the art of wood carving. A characteristic feature of Khiva carvers was their ability to perform work of various profiles. They were simultaneously carpenters, joiners, builders, and carvers. When choosing materials, Khiva craftsmen gave preference to local types of wood. Wood carving masters created column doors and other architectural details, both for religious buildings - mosques, madrassas, and for the houses of wealthy people. In the first half of the 19th century, orders for carvings in the interiors of mosques and madrassas in Khiva were received quite often. The nature of the carvings of local craftsmen of that time is evidenced by a sample of a wooden carved door from the Payanda mosque in Khiva.

But already in the middle of this century, most of the orders came for the creation of architectural details from carved wood to decorate private houses of the wealthy segments of the population. Carved doors for rich houses were made from apricot and mulberry wood. A remarkable example of such a door was discovered in the former house of the Khiva court official Mad-Niyaz Divan-begi.

One of the earliest surviving carved Khiva columns is a column from the Arab-khona mosque in Khiva, dating back to 1616. The column is decorated with a plastic plant pattern, the powerful stems of which tightly entwined the trunk. The carving is made using a deep technique, the column with monumental patterns looks monumental and solemn. Classics of the Khivan art of wood carving are the columns and doors in the buildings of the Ichan-Kala complex. The huge number of columns in the interior of the Juma Mosque building amazes with the variety of techniques and beauty of patterns. This high tradition can also be seen in the decoration of the Khiva column, made at the beginning of the 19th century.

Another major center of wood carving in the 19th-20th centuries was Tashkent, where there was a developed school of wood carving art. At the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries, in the work of Tashkent masters, along with the artistic design of architectural structures, household carving occupied a significant place. To a large extent, this was due to the capital status of Tashkent, a significant part of the population of which was the Russian population. Multifaceted tables, boxes, and other objects were covered with elegant carvings using a compass, as a result of which the technique itself received the name pargori uyma. Tashkent carved doors of this period are distinguished by flat-relief carvings of predominantly floral ornamentation.

The name of Kh. Najmeddinov has come down to us from the Kokand carvers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Working in Kokand, Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent and other cities, he was well acquainted with the peculiarities of artistic carving of various schools and gained great fame for his mastery of a large number of variations of pargori carving, which he used to decorate furniture and household items made of walnut and plane tree.

Examples of 19th-century carved doors from Bukhara demonstrate the skill of the carvers of this center in the use of shallow geometric carvings. Just like in the decor of Samarkand doors, here, against the background of a flat ornament, a deep pattern in the form of star-shaped rosettes is carved. At the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries, carved multifaceted tables with elongated upward shapes became widespread in Bukhara, as well as in Tashkent. Their pattern had a mixed floral and geometric character; the center of the composition of the table cover was a six or eight-ray rosette. The carving was deep and plastically expressive.

There was constant creative communication between masters representing various schools of wood carving. Thus, it is known from sources that some master carvers of the Fergana Valley worked in Tashkent. The famous Margilan carver Usta Maksim Khoja (died at the end of the 19th century) made various plane gates of the Sheikhtaur cemetery. Tashkent masters, such as Azimdzhan Babajanov, worked in Kokand and Andijan in 1903-1904.

The widespread use of wooden carved columns, doors and other architectural elements is observed in the architecture of the capitals of the Uzbek khanates - Khiva, Bukhara, Kokand, as well as in Samarkand and Tashkent. Khiva was one of the leading centers of the art of wood carving. Classics of the Khiva art of wood carving are columns and doors in the buildings of the Ichan-Kala complex (carved columns in the interior of the Juma Mosque monument). Well-known representatives of the school of Khiva carvers are the Palvanov dynasty, whose hands made many carved columns and doors of Khiva in the 19th – early 20th

centuries. The elegant products created by the famous master from Kokand Kadyrzhan Khaidarov, who embodied in his work the best traditions of the Kokand school of wood carving, are widely known. The range of his products covers both architectural details - doors, panels, friezes, and a variety of household items - decorative tables, stools, benches, pencil cases - calamdons, etc.

During the same period, other Kokand masters, students of K. Khaidarov - G. Akhunov, R. Ganiev, O. Takhirov, U. Tashmatov, I. Izakov, Y. Umarov from Margilan carvers, began their work actively during this period. The pattern of the carved table by K. Khaidarov, made in the pargori technique, is elegant, and has similarities in the decor with the works of the Tashkent carver S. Khojaev, which indicates the common features of the Tashkent and Kokand schools of carving.

Tashkent wood carving of the twentieth century is represented by the work of such masters as S. Khojaev, M. Kasymov, Sh. Gulyamov, A. Faizullaev, N. Ibragimov, Sh. Agzamov and others. Tashkent wood carving masters achieved excellent results in 1950-1960 in the manufacture of household items - boxes, stands, decorative panels and grilles. Tashkent carvers have always been distinguished by the fact that ornamental patterns were carved on two or three levels. Another distinctive feature of the Tashkent school of wood carving was the use of tint on the surface of the relief, as well as coating it with varnish.

Using various types of wood, Tashkent carvers have achieved true perfection in creating a rich variety of shapes and decor. The carving style of S. Khojaev with the emphasis on the central part, the pargori technique and the characteristic geometric pargori pattern is one of the local features of the Tashkent school. Carved doors made by M. Kasymov for the Opera and Ballet Theater named after A. Navoi in Tashkent are made in the best traditions of the local school. His worthy successors were A. Faizullaev and N. Ibragimov.

Woodcraft art in Samarkand holds a significant place in the cultural heritage of the region. Samarkand, located in modern-day Uzbekistan, has a rich history dating back thousands of years. The art of woodcraft has been practiced and perfected by skilled artisans in this region, showcasing their craftsmanship and creativity. Woodcraft in Samarkand encompasses a wide range of techniques and styles, reflecting the diverse influences that have shaped the city's history. The art form combines traditional methods with innovative designs, resulting in exquisite pieces that are both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

One of the distinctive features of Samarkand's woodcraft art is the intricate carving and ornamentation. Artisans meticulously carve intricate patterns and motifs onto wooden surfaces, showcasing their attention to detail and mastery of the craft. These patterns often draw inspiration from nature, Islamic geometric designs, and historical architectural elements found in the region.

The choice of wood is also crucial in Samarkand's woodcraft art. Local artisans prefer using high-quality woods such as walnut, cherry, and mulberry, known for their durability and beautiful grain patterns. The selection of wood not only enhances the visual appeal of the final product but also ensures its longevity.

Samarkand's woodcraft art is not limited to decorative objects alone. Skilled craftsmen also create functional items such as furniture, doors, and window frames. These pieces not only serve practical purposes but also showcase the artistic prowess of the artisans. The incorporation of intricate carvings and designs into everyday objects elevates their aesthetic value and transforms them into works of art.

The preservation and promotion of woodcraft art in Samarkand are of utmost importance. Efforts are being made to pass down the traditional techniques and knowledge from one generation to the next. Artisans are encouraged to continue honing their skills and exploring new possibilities within the art form. Furthermore, initiatives have been taken to showcase Samarkand's woodcraft art to a wider audience. Museums and galleries in the region exhibit exquisite woodcraft pieces, allowing visitors to appreciate the beauty and craftsmanship firsthand. Additionally, workshops and training programs are organized to educate enthusiasts and aspiring artisans about the techniques and intricacies of this art form.

In conclusion, woodcraft art in Samarkand is a testament to the region's rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions. The intricate carvings, attention to detail, and use of high-quality wood make these pieces truly remarkable. Through preservation and promotion, Samarkand's woodcraft art continues to thrive, captivating audiences with its timeless beauty and craftsmanship.