

Investigating Kashan Woven Silks at Art Institute of Chicago and Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Introduction

The woven silk of Kashan is a part of the identity of Iranian exquisite handmade artifacts. The prosperity of these products dates back to the Safavid era and the development of textile and carpet weaving workshops. Kashan, with its ancient silk civilization, weavers, and geographical position, plays an important role in the textile trades. The ability of Kashani weavers to weave textiles and produce delicate silk carpets is a tangible heritage of culture and art. Investigation of the silk fabrics of Art Institute of Chicago and of Iranian textiles in Metropolitan Museum shows abundant Kashan silk handwoven products. Cheap substitute products and expensive raw materials for weaving silk textiles led to the recession of the traditional silk-weaving culture. To solve this problem, identifying weaving techniques and the fabrics produced in the past will emphasize the importance of indigenous knowledge of woven carpets. The aim of the present research was to study the characteristics of Kashan's silk fabrics at Art Institute of Chicago and at the Metropolitan Museum.

Materials and Methods

In Art Institute of Chicago, there is a collection of donated silk fabrics and silk Zari weavings, which comprise nearly half of the Iranian silk fabrics woven in Kashan. Metropolitan Museum also houses hand-woven silk textiles in the form of carpets and fabrics from Kashan, which is noteworthy. Therefore, to identify and examine the characteristics of Kashan silk textiles through the samples available in Chicago Art Institute's website and Metropolitan Museum of Art, the research seeks to address the following two questions: a) What are the characteristics of Kashan silk textile patterns in Art Institute of Chicago and Metropolitan Museum of Art? b) What are the structural features of silk textiles belonging to Chicago Art Institute and Metropolitan Museum of Art? Twenty-four silk textile samples from Kashan were examined. The research data was collected through the library study and digital sources. The method deployed in this study is a descriptive-analytical one.

Results and Findings

In Art Institute of Chicago, there are twelve pieces of silk or zari cloth known as Kashan. These remaining pieces that were donated to the institute are kept in Islamic Art Department and in Textile Department of the Art Institute of Chicago. In Metropolitan Museum of New York, which includes a treasure of Iranian handwovens, there are Kashan carpets and some fabrics. The textiles in Art Institute of Chicago are made of silk as their primary material and have been produced in velvet, Zari weaving, and embossed patterns. This is also true for the weaving method of fabrics in Metropolitan Museum. The woven designs in the fabrics of the Art Institute of Chicago are all botanical, while the worked designs in the silk weavings of Metropolitan Museum include botanical, human, and animal motifs. In addition to fabrics, Metropolitan Museum houses Iranian carpets in the Islamic Art section. These carpets are woven entirely of silk or have silk pile and cotton weft with curved line patterns in a quarter and overall form. The carpet weaving technique is double-knotted and uses asymmetrical knots; the method of weaving silk threads is either simple or compound diagonal weaving with the use of expensive gold and black threads on a silk background.

Conclusion

The study on twenty-four samples of Kashan's silk textiles showed that the woven textiles of Art Institute of Chicago are made of silk, gold, and silver. *Vagireh designs, affected by nature, were also applied. The silk textiles of Metropolitan Museum contained carpet and cloth. These carpets were up to 6 m² in area with Animal Combat, Corner, and Medallion design belonging to the Safavid period. The fabric patterns were woven in human, animal, and plant forms with silk threads. Various designs and weaving techniques were found in the textiles as a model for the survival of Kashan handwoven products. The research findings were consistent with the results of other studies such as Khosravi, Bezhayam, and Dadras (2015), conducted on Iranian carpets in Metropolitan Museum. It is suggested to continue this research by studying handwoven textiles in historical periods in museums worldwide or conducting comparative studies of Iranian textiles with those of other countries.*

Keywords: silk and brocade fabrics, carpet, Art Institute of Chicago, Metropolitan Museum.