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INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE RELATED TO CLAY IN CRAFTSMANSHIP

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Abstract
This article highlights the types of intangible cultural heritage associated with craftsmanship and tandoori making. It discusses the history of pottery, the intangible cultural heritage associated with clay, and the preservation and transformation processes of values and unique traditions passed down from generation to generation.

Keywords: Crafts, pottery, intangible cultural heritage, earthenware, potter, potter, tiler, tagzir, “bir pesh” and “ikki pesh”, patron saints, traditions, ceremonies, straw clay, daskir, dehqan bob, nimcha, ocho tandir and toy tandir.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological findings characteristic of the Fergana Valley indicate that pottery production had already developed in this region during the Bronze Age.[1]
In pottery making, the more thoroughly the clay is kneaded and processed, the higher the quality of the ceramic product. As a result of many years of practical experience, potters gradually specialized in the production of particular types of wares, such as bowl makers (kosapaz), jug makers (ko‘zapaz), tile makers (koshinchi), and tandoor makers (tandirchi).
By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pottery production in the valley had reached a higher level of development and acquired a number of local characteristics. In particular, the village of Rishton in Kokand Uyezd became one of the largest pottery centers in Central Asia, where approximately 80 pottery workshops were operating at the beginning of the twentieth century.[2]

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During this period, pottery production also flourished in the villages of Namangan Uyezd. Bowls and large storage jars (khums) were produced in the Chuqur-Ko‘chin and Sardoba volosts. Pottery products were manufactured for both market sale and custom orders in G‘urumsaroy, Sang, and Chodak villages of Namangan Uyezd, as well as in Asaka village of Andijan Uyezd. Specialized neighborhoods of ordinary pottery producers emerged in Kosonsoy and Shahand villages.

The pottery traditions of Rishton, G‘urumsaroy, Asaka, and Sang shared common characteristics in terms of production techniques, forms, ornamentation, and colors, while at the same time possessing distinctive local features. In the Rishton style, a colorless glaze made from white stone and alkali was applied to the surface, after which an additional glaze prepared from the qirqbo‘g‘im plant (horsetail) was added over the decorative patterns.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The emergence of pottery centers in the valley was closely connected with the availability of natural raw materials. Such centers developed around the clay deposits of Tuproqxona (“Khoki Surkh” – “red clay”) in Rishton, Adir in G‘urumsaroy, Xokdom in Chodak, the Kulol neighborhood in Sang, and the Xonariqbo‘yi clay deposit in Asaka.[3]

Various mineral resources also played an important role in pottery production. For example, Rishton received gilbo‘ta clay from Isfara, mag‘l and jo‘sha (red clay) from Chorsu, while G‘urumsaroy obtained white stone and alkali from the mountain Kyrgyz communities and copper from local mines and Kokand.[4]

Tandoor-making was another highly developed branch of pottery in the valley. Various types of tandoors were widespread, including daskir, dehqonbob, nimcha, two-and-a-half pesh, three-pesh, somsapaz, stove tandoors, and wedding tandoors. In Gulqishloq, tandoors were produced with large bodies, pronounced shoulders, and relatively narrow openings. In Shahrixon, they were characterized by smaller bodies and broader shoulders, while in Oqyer they featured small openings and shoulders with elongated bodies gradually widening downward from the shoulder section. These variations were influenced by local needs, the characteristics of available raw materials, and long-established craft traditions.[5]

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In densely populated agricultural villages surrounding Kokand, tandoor production gradually shifted toward custom-based manufacturing. Examples of such specialized production can be found in Oqyer in the southern part of the valley and Gulqishloq in the western region. Large villages typically had their own tandoor makers.

In remote settlements located far from major markets, tandoor production developed primarily as a household craft. For instance, V. Nalivkin reported that by the late nineteenth century household tandoor production was widespread in the foothill villages of Nanay, Ko‘kyor, Qizilyozi, and Oqtom in Namangan Uyezd.[6]

The size of household tandoors was determined according to family needs. The largest domestic tandoor was known as the nimcha tandoor. Household tandoors generally consisted of one-pesh and two-pesh varieties. Larger versions were referred to as two-and-a-half pesh tandoors, while professional bakery tandoors typically consisted of three pesh. In addition, special somsa tandoors were produced specifically for baking somsa pastries.

Potters also manufactured large clay storage jars (khums) used for preserving grain, flour, and other food products. Flour stored in such jars retained its quality for extended periods without deterioration.[7]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Special types of clay were used for making tandoors. Even today, it is possible to observe differences between tandoors produced in the Rishton, Buvayda, and Uzbekistan districts of Fergana Region. Master craftsmen in Rishton and Buvayda traditionally use red clay (the same type of clay is also used in Chust), whereas in the Uzbekistan district black and blue-gray clay (commonly referred to as gray clay by local people) is preferred.[8]

According to master craftsman Abdullajon Ota, black and blue clay suitable for tandoor production can only be obtained from a nine-hectare area in the village of Qushqo‘noq. Similar high-quality clay deposits are not found elsewhere. He also noted that if these two types of clay are not mixed in equal proportions, it is impossible to obtain high-quality clay suitable for making tandoors. Abdullajon Ota and his wife, Xodixon Aya, have been producing tandoors together for more

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than forty years, and even their daughters have mastered the craft. According to Abdullajon Ota, the production of tandoors is mainly practiced by representatives of Uzbek and Tajik ethnic groups, while members of the Kyrgyz community are rarely involved in this craft.

The techniques used in tandoor production also vary. The clay is first soaked and aged, then divided into lumps and thoroughly kneaded by foot. It is subsequently shaped into long cylindrical forms of equal diameter and placed on a flat, dry surface where it is flattened by foot into broad slabs. These slabs are known as pesh.

For one-pesh tandoors, the slab is spread wider or narrower depending on the desired size of the tandoor. For two-pesh tandoors, the lower slab is first prepared in a flat form. This part is called the base pesh. Once it hardens sufficiently to maintain a vertical position, three or four people lift it and shape it into a circle.

Afterward, special tools known as the tovoncha and g‘undaq are used. Initially, the slab is beaten with a toothed tovoncha, known as the hom tovoncha. During this process, the inner side of the tandoor is shaped using the g‘undaq, while the outer side is worked with the tovoncha. After the slab hardens for approximately 30–60 minutes, the toothed tool is replaced with a smooth, toothless dog‘ tovoncha, and the shaping process continues.[9]

According to the craftsmen, the term “yetildi” (“it has matured” or “it is ready”) is frequently used in tandoor making. This term refers to the stage when the slab has hardened sufficiently to maintain its own shape after being raised. Only experienced masters can determine this stage accurately.

Furthermore, after being worked with the hom tovoncha, the slab becomes somewhat softer. Before the second stage of shaping, known as dog‘ini urish (“finishing the surface”), additional time is required for the slab to harden again. The duration of this process depends on factors such as air temperature, the dryness of the ground, and whether the slab is exposed to direct sunlight or kept in the shade.

After the slab is raised, it is beaten at least twice. The first stage is called “urish xomi” (initial shaping), while the second is known as “dog‘ini terish” (surface finishing). The upper section of the tandoor is formed from a crescent-shaped slab. The craftsman must carefully calculate the timing so that both the lower and

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upper sections reach the required degree of hardness simultaneously. By the time the lower section is completed, it must be strong enough to support the upper section, while the upper section must be capable of maintaining its own shape.

The upper part, which forms the mouth of the tandoor, is gradually narrowed into a circular shape, creating the characteristic "belly" and "shoulder" of the tandoor. During the shaping process, the interior surface is smoothed with the g'undaq until it becomes even and polished.

The final stage is known as "og'zini tortish" ("forming the mouth"). At this stage, the upper section must have reached the proper level of hardness so that it can support the additional clay used to shape the rim. A specific amount of clay is kneaded, stretched, and attached to the moistened mouth of the tandoor. After leveling the clay, a special tool called lapkash—made of felt or thick fabric—is used to shape the rim.

The craftsman moistens the lapkash with water and, while pressing it against the rim, rotates it to create the desired form. Tandoor mouths may be produced in various shapes, including vertical, flat, and round forms. Household tandoors generally have a vertical opening, whereas somsa and bakery tandoors usually have round openings.[10]

After completion, the tandoor is left to dry.

As mentioned above, tandoors are installed in different ways. In the Fergana Valley, special tandoor houses are commonly constructed. The installation process begins with the preparation of a foundation. A P-shaped stone structure is built or a concrete base is poured, after which walls measuring 80–120 cm in height are constructed using bricks or adobe blocks.

Wooden or metal beams are then placed on top of the walls and covered with roofing material. The P-shaped walls are raised by an additional 30–50 cm and filled with sand. The sand is shaped into a semi-circular mold corresponding to the form of the tandoor, into which the tandoor is laid horizontally with its mouth facing the open side of the P-shaped structure.

The sides of the tandoor are then packed with soil and firmly compacted using a shovel or hoe handle. The exposed upper part is coated with straw-mixed clay. Before this stage, approximately one-third of the interior of the tandoor is filled with soil and a fire is lit inside.

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Based on field research materials, we have attempted to highlight the knowledge, skills, customs, and values associated with pottery and tandoor-making, which constitute important attributes of the intangible cultural heritage of the peoples of the Fergana Valley. Below, we discuss the patron saints, customs, and ritual systems related to handicrafts in the Fergana Valley.

In the cultural traditions of Turan, the patron saint of a craft was usually regarded as a prominent religious figure or legendary person who had received knowledge of a particular craft from God and then transmitted it to humanity. According to traditional treatises (risolas), bakers and cooks considered the Archangel Gabriel their patron; weavers revered Eve (Momo Havo) or the Prophet Abraham; tailors recognized the Prophet Idris; blacksmiths honored the Prophet David; oil-press workers regarded Khoja Ro‘shoyi Ota as their patron; and barbers considered Salman the Pure (Salman al-Farsi) to be their spiritual protector.

Referring to studies on handicrafts, S. Davlatova notes that all potters recognized Said Kulol, also known as Shamsiddin Kulol, as their patron saint, while Bahauddin Naqshband was regarded as the patron of hired masters, assistants, and apprentices who did not possess their own workshops. Goldsmiths, blacksmiths, foundry workers, bakers, and some potters who worked with fire also considered Hazrat David (Prophet David) to be their patron. Embroiderers and shoemakers who worked with needles revered Bobo Porado‘z as their patron saint. Furthermore, gold embroiderers regarded Hazrat Yusuf (Prophet Joseph), considered the first master embroiderer and invisible spiritual protector, as their patron.[11]

Builders and carpenters likewise had their own patron saints. During the construction of houses, when beams or wooden structures were raised, craftsmen received a payment known as keskilik haqi. According to tradition, the master craftsman was expected to dedicate prayers and blessings from his earnings to the founder of the profession. The patron saint of builders was Ibrahim Khalilullah (the Prophet Abraham), who was honored among the people as a great builder. The Prophet Noah was recognized as the patron of woodworking because he was believed to have built the first wooden boat.[12]

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Beliefs concerning these patron saints, along with the legends, rituals, and customs associated with them, have survived to a certain extent as part of the cultural traditions of the people of the Fergana Valley up to the present day.

Sericulture and the associated belief systems have also been widespread in the valley. Silk producers recognized Hazrat Ayyub (the Prophet Job), revered in Islam as a holy figure, as the patron saint of their profession. In addition, silk artisans believed in spiritual patrons such as Hasti Shishi Nabi and Burkuzar Masli Vali.[13] Since sericulture and silk production were traditionally dominated by men, the patron cult of the profession also took the form of male spiritual protectors. This aspect further confirms that such beliefs in the valley are connected with ancient traditions of ancestor veneration.

Among the Kyrgyz population of the valley, Umay Ana was regarded as the patroness of weaving.[14] Before beginning their work, Kyrgyz weavers would pray, saying: “These are not my hands, but the hands of Mother Umay.”[15] The figure of Umay Ana appears among other Central Asian peoples as well: among Uzbeks as Ambar Ona, among Tajiks as Momokho, and among Kazakhs as May Ana.[16]

CONCLUSION

In general, numerous studies and international projects concerning the cultural, social, and economic significance of handicrafts are being conducted in various research centers around the world. The knowledge, skills, customs, and rituals associated with handicrafts among the inhabitants of the Fergana Valley have been preserved to a considerable extent up to the present day.

The widespread existence of traditional craft-related knowledge and skills among the people, together with the well-preserved master-apprentice (ustoz-shogird) tradition, plays an important role in the preservation and development of our intangible cultural heritage. These traditions not only ensure the continuity of craftsmanship but also contribute to safeguarding the cultural identity and historical memory of future generations.

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