

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF IRANIAN TURKMEN JEWELRY AND FACTORS AFFECTED THEIR FORMATION

MAHSHID EBADI

ABSTRACT

Iranian Turkmen have reflected their unique art in their large-scale jewelry. It is important to point out that Turkmen jewelry was not only a form of adornment, but also had religious, cultural and economical functions. Aside from identifying the characteristics of Turkmen jewelry, this research investigates their roots and factors affected their formation.

Turkmen jewelry has been classified and described using its distinctive characteristics in this study. This includes sound, similarity to war tools, large scale, materials, ornamental stones, motifs and applications. In addition to these characteristics, a general understanding of Turkmen history and culture can be utilized to identify the factors influencing the creation of Turkmen jewelry. These factors include religion and beliefs, livelihood, the surrounding environment, and socio-ethnic status. This will provide a deeper understanding of Turkmen jewelry art as well as an insight into the lifestyle and beliefs of Turkmen.

KEYWORDS: Iranian Turkmen jewelry, Motifs, religion and beliefs, dominant livelihood, living environment, socio-ethnic status

INTRODUCTION

The decorative vocabulary features stylized vegetal designs, zoomorphic imagery, tree-of-life motifs, ram's heads, floral designs (particularly tulips), and forms such as bows and arrows (used on boy's amulets to signify strength) [4]. Size, movement, sound and color include the most important visual characteristics and appearance of these accessories [5]. Turkmen ornament is monumental in scale and regal in appearance. It is often described as possessing a martial quality, evoking images of the bravery of Turkmen women during the late nineteenth-century wars with Russia and of the warrior queens of the ancient Near East [4].

Myths, surrounding environment and the emergence of Islam were three factors which plays an important role in Turkmen art [5]. Turco-Mongol and pre-Islamic beliefs and practices were routine among the Turkmen, who called upon whatever forces they deemed helpful. This can be seen very clearly in the totemic decorative motifs such as ram's heads, double-headed eagles and tree-of-life images on Turkmen clothing, embroidery, rugs and silver ornaments [4]. In Turkmen ornaments, we come across all kinds of animal figures that are expressed in abstract form. Because the Turkmen goldsmith did not consider these designs permissible due to his Islamic beliefs and tried to use the motifs of halal animals [2].

Although the Turkmen are primarily perceived as nomads inhabiting the steppes and deserts, they also formed a sedentary agrarian society and developed extensive contacts with the merchants and craftsmen of the great urban centers where textiles, jewelry, and metalwork were manufactured. [4]. Costumes show the social, economic, religious, occupational and mindset of their wearers [1]. The second most common inlay stone was turquoise, a relatively soft hydrated copper aluminum phosphate found in Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkistan [4]. The anklet is used both on the leg and on the arm. When the anklet is worn on the arm, its opening is closed and the inside is empty so that sand can be poured into it to produce sound [3].

By understanding the characteristics of Turkmen jewelry, along with studying the history and culture, climate and lifestyle of those peoples, it is possible to identify the factors that played a role in the formation of their art. Art was utilized to preserve traditions, to transfer and express cultures and their concepts. Therefore, Turkmen, like other Iranian ethnic groups, have uniquely presented their culture and history in their jewelry art. This allows us to analyze and examine the history, lifestyle and traditions prevailing in the lives of our ancestors.

DISCUSSION

One of the oldest arts is jewelry making. It has manifested itself in various forms and has become one of the most obvious cultural signs of human societies. Jewelry was not only used to beautify a person and it was an asset for collecting wealth, as well as a method of transmitting culture and maintaining ethnic identity.

Evidently, each ethnic group of Iran has presented their culture in a special way in their jewelry, and unique works have been left behind. Although these works are not widely used nowadays, some of them are still made by these clans, especially in rural areas. One of these tribes that has still preserved a part of its ethnic identity, traditions, clothing

and jewelry is the Turkmen tribe. Turkmen are a branch of Central Asian Turks known as Oghuz or Ghoz, who migrated to West Asia and settled in different areas including Iran. At first, they were followers of shamanism, and then they converted to Islam. Moreover, they were mainly nomadic and dependent on their livestock until the beginning of the 20th century. Turkmen are composed of several clans such as Yomut and Teke in Iran and are concentrated in the northeast of the country. Their principal cities include Bandar Turkmen, Aqqala, Gonbad-Kavus and Gomishan in Golestan Province, and Raz and Jargalan in North Khorasan Province, where Turkmen traditions and Turkmen jewelry can still be found.

Turkmen goldsmiths used movement, sound, and abstract motifs to create jewelry made from silver, agate, turquoise, and colored glass. These jewelries, which were used by men, children and mostly women, have large scales that attract attention. In addition, their general shape reminds us of war tools such as helmets and shields. These characteristics are common in most of the jewelry of the Turkmen clans, although there are differences in their design and techniques.

Turkmen art and culture, which still exist in some regions, contain information that has been passed down to the next generation. Art pieces are narrators of stories and beliefs, some of which have been forgotten over time, and some have been transformed under the influence of various factors. However, traditional images are still stable and can be studied. By examining the influences shaping previous artifacts, we are able to gain insight into aspects affecting contemporary art and life.

Research presented here is based on studying jewelry pieces, books, papers, as well as oral reports from the Iranian Turkmen who continue to practice the traditions of their predecessors. This research, with a descriptive method that relies on images, has introduced the types of Turkmen jewelry, their distinctive characteristics, and investigated the influencing factors on the formation of these jewelry. Most of the art works used in this research belong to the collection of Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf. Most of the pieces in this collection date back to the 19th and 20th centuries and were donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In general, attention to Turkmen art and jewelry is less than other arts in this region, and as a result, less information and papers is available.

Finally, this research seeks to answer this question: What factors affect the characteristics and motifs of Turkmen jewelry?

CHARACTERISTICS OF TURKMEN JEWELRY

In order to investigate the factors affecting the formation and the design of these jewelries, we examine their significant characteristics. It is because they offer insight into the factors that influence their formation. The salient characteristics of Turkmen jewelry include sound, similarity to war tools, large scales, ornamental stones, material, motifs and application.

SOUND

Sound is one of the most striking features of Turkmen jewelry. At the end of some Turkmen jewelry, there are long chains with bells and small pieces that all together produce a pleasing sound because of movement, as if someone is playing an instrument (Figure 1). The reason for Turkmen goldsmiths' attention to sounds can be found in Turkmen's interest in music. There was no accident in the musical dimension of Turkmen jewelry. An examination of pieces in the Wolf collection shows that each sphere or bell emits a different note, producing a harmonious sound overall [4].



Figure 1

A crop of Aq-yag

Chains and bells

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

This musical aspect is also related to shamanic beliefs. Turkmens believed that the produced sound would keep them away from evil spirits and it seems that this belief is rooted in shamanism and Turco-Mongol beliefs. As an example, Turkmen have a jewelry piece called Buqai, which consists of several bells. As soon as the child begins walking, it is attached to its feet to keep it safe from evil spirits by producing sound. The use of sound in jewelry art can also be seen in other cultures in Iran. Among these types of accessories, we can mention anklets.

Anklet is worn on the hands and feet by southern Iranian women and other ethnicities, such as Baluch and Kurds. The anklet is round and has a hollow space in which sand or seashells are poured, so that it produces a sound when moving [3].

SIMILARITY TO WAR TOOLS

Turkmen jewelry are similar to war tools. Qobe, collar stud, bracelets with finger rings are reminiscent of war and defense tools. For example, a Qobe is a headdress that has a half-sphere at its upper end, on which there is a cylinder. Decorated with decorative stones or glass, pendants are hung from the sides of the hat. The overall design is reminiscent of a helmet (Figure 2).



Figure 2

Qobe

Geography: Iran

Date: Contemporary

Gorgan Craft Museum

Another example is large bracelets, some of which have five finger rings attached to them. A sample of these bracelets made by the Teke clan can be seen in Figure 3. With five rings attached, these bracelets cover the wrist to elbow and are decorated with agates.



Figure 3

Braclet and Finger Rings

Geography: Iran or Central Asia

Date: Late 19th century

National Museum of Turkmenistan

Some believe that these jewelries are not only a means of adorning and keeping wealth for Turkmen women, but also as tools of self-defense. Because Turkmen women fought side-by-side with men in wars, such as the late nineteenth-century wars with Russia. Some also believe that these jewelries are pieces of war tools that were turned into jewelry for women in peacetime.

The influence of war tools can also be seen in jewelry called Aq-yag, which is similar to a bow and arrow. It is decorated with ornamental stones alongside chains and bells that are hung at the bottom of the main part (Figure 4). The back of the boy's shirt (Kurte) is decorated with small talismans - especially those that show a bow and arrow (Oq-yag), sword ax - and plates (Bez bent) on the shoulders [1].



Figure 4

Aq-yag

Geography: Iran or Central Asia

Date: Late 19th century

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

LARGE SCALE

One of the most obvious characteristics of Turkmen jewelry is large scale, which is rarely observed in other Iranian arts. Due to the size of these accessories, their weight is also very high which makes it difficult for women to move. Turkmen women had become a kind of living art, and the wealth and power of the tribe was shown by the heavy silver ornaments they wore with pride [4].

Accordingly, the size and number of jewelry pieces determine a person's social status. Another reason for their impressive dimensions is their similarity to war tools. As explained above, these jewelries aren't only used as a way of beautifying Turkmen women or preserving wealth. They were also used for defense purposes. As another explanation, they may have been pieces of war tools that were repurposed as jewelry for women during peace.

Figure 5 shows a Turkmen woman from Jarglan, North Khorasan Province, located in the northeastern part of Iran. Her Turkmen clothing is decorated with jewelry pieces such as collar stud which is used on the chest, under the neck. Furthermore, the dress is embellished with many small circular silver accessories with a bulge in the middle.



Figure 5

Turkmen Woman

Geography: Jargalan, Iran

Date: Contemporary

Photo: Nasrollah Kasraian

ORNAMENTAL STONES

Decorative stones and colored glasses are used to decorate Turkmen jewelry. Most of the stones found in Turkmen jewelry are agate and some are turquoise (Figure 6). However, colored glass is also used to decorate jewelry pieces.

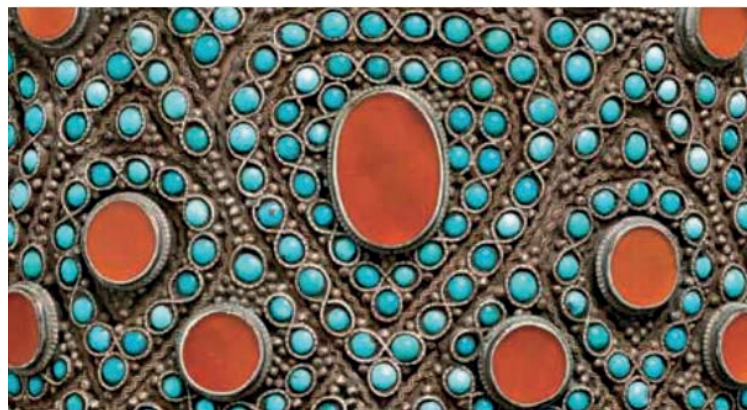


Figure 6

A crop of a crown

Materials: Agate, Turquoise, Silver

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

These ornamental stones are often red or turquoise, which have symbolic meanings. In Turkmen belief, red prevents bleeding and is also a symbol of youthful power. Additionally, turquoise protects people from the evil eye. These stones are also used because Turkmen had access to mines nearby. Turquoise and agate mines are still present near Turkmen living areas. In the northeast of Iran, for instance, the Neishabur turquoise mine is one of the oldest turquoise mines in the world. Turkmen jewelry is

made of silver or gold, although gold is rarely used. The majority of works are silver or gilded silver or a combination of silver and gold. Turkmen beliefs are one reason for using silver. They believed that silver could kill microbes and used it as a wound salve. Additionally, it was believed that metal could dispel magic. Turco-Mongol cultures can be cited as sources of inspiration for this idea. The second reason is the availability of silver. The silver and gold used in making Turkmen jewelry originated from Iranian, Russian and Chinese coins that were used for trade in the region [4].

MOTIFS

Turkmen goldsmiths have used symmetry, balance, repetition and abstract motifs in the creation of Turkmen jewelry. These motifs include animal, vegetal, celestial, human, geometric and Eslimi (Arabesque) motifs.

ANIMAL MOTIFS

A variety of animal motifs can be found on Turkmen jewelry, including camels and ram horns. One of the most significant and frequent patterns seen in Turkmen jewelry is the ram's horn. An example of ram's horn being used in Turkmen jewelry is the Bozband, a scroll that is hung on the back of a boy's clothing or sleeves (Figure 7). As part of this jewelry, there is a container in which prayer papers are placed as a means of protecting the child from the devil's eye. Besides the prayer box, this accessory features chains and bells as well. It was believed by Turkmen that the sound of bells could keep children away from the devil.



Figure 7

Bozband

Geography: Iran or Central Asia

Date: Late 19th-early 20th century

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The reason for using animal motifs can be found in the surrounding environment and livelihood of Turkmens. Having rams as an animal has been extremely beneficial to their nomadic lifestyle and survival. Milk and meat of the ram provided food, and its wool was used to make clothes, rugs, and other necessities. It is worth mentioning that the horns of the ram and cow (or the ram and cow) are symbols of fertility in other Iranian cultures. The roots of this motif can be found in ancient Iranian artifacts such as pottery.

Another animal motif that is prominent in Turkmen jewelry is the camel. Figure 8 presents an example of the camel motif in Turkmen jewelry. This item has legs that end in bells and is decorated with agate stones. In Turkmen jewelry, a triangle is also used to symbolize a camel's hump, which is shown in the amulet holder (Figure 9). These amulets are composed of a hollow cylinder attached to the base of a triangle. At the end of the cylindrical container, chains and bells are hung. Additionally, keeping prayers in scrolls was common before conversion to Islam and continued afterwards. The prayer was replaced by verses from the Quran written on paper.



Figure 8
Amulet in the shape of camel
Geography: Iran or Central Asia
Date: Late 19th-early 20th century
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

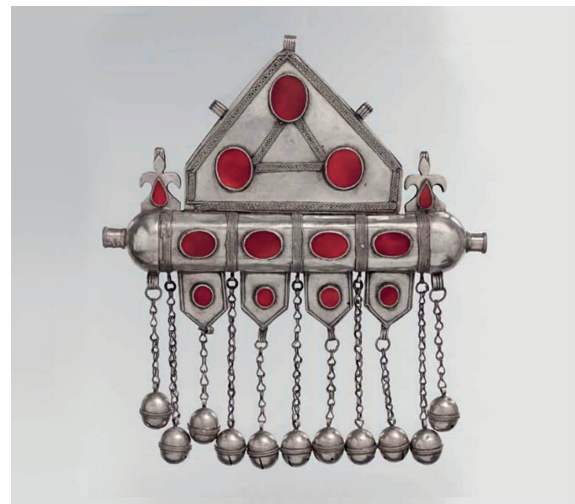


Figure 9
Triangle Amulet holder
Geography: Iran or Central Asia
Date: Late 19th-early 20th century
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

There are also camels in the Turkmen's surrounding area. In addition to providing food and wool, it served as a means of transportation for the Turkmens. Camels have high resilience to travel long distances in dry and waterless climates. Therefore, the camel, which is a symbol of resistance and resilience in Turkmen culture, has a sacred and honorable place and is presented in Turkmen jewelry. It should be noted that the simple form of an amulet is also seen in other cultures of Iran.

VEGETAL MOTIFS

Turkmen jewelry also contains plant motifs and goldsmiths have depicted trees and flowers in their jewelry. The tree of life is one of the frequent motifs of Iranians and other cultures and it is a symbol of the lost paradise or the origin of human. In Turkmen jewelry, trees come in a single, double, or triple form and are decorated with ornamental stones, usually a middle stone. An example is the Ashiq, which is used to adorn women's hair (Figure 10).

flower is the other motif which is presented in various abstract ways (Figure 11). Idi flower is a motif with 9 petals, those women who are barren and believe it as sacred flower of 9 petals flower would sew the motif along their dress sleeves or collar to make them fertile [5]. It is worth mentioning that the flower motif is widely used in all Iranian arts.



Figure 10
Ashiq-Single Adverse tree-(Cordiform Pendant)
Geography: Iran or Central Asia
Date: Late 19th-early 20th century
The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Figure 11
Floral pectoral ornament
Geography: Central Asia
Date: Late 19th-early 20th century
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

vegetal motifs presence in Turkmen art can be related to their surrounding nature, as well as their beliefs. Turkmen used inverse tree in their jewelry pieces. It has its roots in the sky, and in shamanic beliefs it is connected to the global earth or the birth of the shaman.

CELESTIAL MOTIFS

Among Turkmen jewelry's motifs, celestial motifs symbolize the sun, moon and stars. The collar stud which can be seen in Figure 12 is an example. This jewelry is in the

shape of a circle. Typically, it begins with a stone in the center, usually round, with circles surrounding it. The circles are decorated with ornamental stones, and in some models, chains are also used. Some believe that the form and idea of the collar stud are influenced by Iranian flower motifs, which are visible in jewelry, carpets and even architecture. On the other hand, for the Turkmen who lived and traveled in the plains and deserts, the night sky was like a compass. Due to their role as lights, the sun and the moon became an integral part of Turkmen life and were reflected in their jewelry.



Figure 12
Collar Stud
Geography: Iran or Central Asia
Date: early 20th century
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

HUMAN MOTIF

Another motif of Turkmen jewelry is the human figure, which can be seen in an accessory called Adamlik (Figure 13). The Adamlik is used in temple pendants, which are attached in pairs to the sides of the headdress, and are often very long.



Figure 13
Adamlik-Temple Pendants
Geography: Iran or Central Asia
Date: early 20th century
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

It has a main body that is on top and displays an abstract design of a human. As seen in Figure 13, the shape of the shoulders, waist and skirt is visible in this jewelry. Chains with repeated small pieces hang from the end of the skirt, reaching two feet high.

The human form in this jewelry is not readily apparent at first glance, and perhaps this is due to the influence of Islam. As depictions of humans are prohibited in Islam, Turkmen goldsmiths created abstract images of humans. Further, the jewelry's appearance is influenced by Mongol art. In their construction, length, and proportions and materials, Turkmen temple pendants bear a striking resemblance to early twentieth-century Mongol headgear [4].

ESLIMI (ARABESQUE) MOTIFS

Eslimi motifs are herbal motifs that are formed with complex lines and curves that have an inward and outward direction. Eslimi motifs are one of the most widely used motifs in Iranian arts, which have been manifested in various fields such as architecture, carpets, tiles, pottery and book design. Turkmen have also used Eslimi motifs to create impressive works, an example of which is presented in Figure 14.



Figure 14
Double Adverse tree (Cordiform Pendant)
Geography: Iran or Central Asia
Date: Late or early 19th century
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Turkmen goldsmith, whose jewelry is often simple, has used Eslimi motifs to decorate his jewelry and filled the surface of his jewelry with these ornaments. In order to implement these motifs, they used methods such as engraving, adding or emptying metal. Skillful use of techniques and Eslimi motifs requires access to appropriate resources, which are typically located in urban areas. Turkmen goldsmiths have been able to skillfully apply Eslimi motifs as a result of their connection to great cities, as well as their transition from nomadic to urban lifestyles.

APPLICATION

Turkmen goldsmiths have designed a unique jewelry piece for each part of the body like a fashion designer. Some pieces are attached to the body and some are sewn to clothing. In addition to being attached to clothes, these jewelries can be connected to each other using chains. The users of these jewelries are men, children and mostly women. As well as serving the function of belief, decoration, and wealth preservation, it also communicates messages of social status, age, marital status, and clan affiliation. For example, among Turkmen, headdresses represent the clan and the marital status. This tradition is still practiced among Turkmen, and after marriage, a Turkmen woman wears a headdress called Anagh as a sign of marriage. (Figure 15). Anagh is similar to a ring and is placed on top of the head. Contemporary Anags can be decorated with fabrics, embroidery, ornamental beads and coins. In another example, after marriage, Turkmen women from the Teke clan wear a headdress called Egme, which represents their clan and marriage (Figure 16).



Figure 15
Anagh
Headdress
Geography: Iran
Date: Contemporary



Figure 16
Egme
Geography: Iran or Central Asia
Date: Late 19th-early 20th century
The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Utilization of clothing and jewelry to communicate concepts such as marriage and belonging to a certain clan can also be seen in other Iranian cultures. Costumes and jewelry convey symbolic meanings. They reflect the gender and age differences, the status and class status of people in different social and ethnic groups [1].

CONCLUSION

Turkmens were nomadic tribes who migrated from Central Asia to the West and some of their clans settled in Iran. There were many influences on Turkmen jewelry, including their surroundings, nomadic life, Turco-Mongol roots, pagan and shamanic beliefs, Islam, and urbanization. All of which formed one of the most striking collections of tribal jewelry. Turkmen jewelry has been shaped by environmental conditions, livelihood, religion, beliefs and socio-ethnic status, and the Turkmen goldsmith has turned these elements into motifs to transfer within jewelry.

Furthermore, in addition to adorning and accumulating wealth, these jewelries have been transmitting and preserving culture and history through the use of a set of symbols in their art. This can be seen in the Turkmen of Iran who still adhere to some of their traditions and art.

REFERENCES

1. Encyclopedia Iranica, Volume V, Clothing in Iran-Zamin, (2008). Translator: Peyman Mateen. Tehran Publications, Amir Kabir
2. Rostami, Mustafa, Mir, Tahira. (2014). The influence of religious beliefs on Turkmen jewelry arrays. Mazandaran University, Faculty of Art and Architecture
3. Safa Isini, Shaya. (1389). Hormozgan women's clothing. Tehran Publications, Roshangaran and Women's Studies
4. Diba, L. S. (2011). Turkmen Jewelry: Silver Ornaments from the Marshall and Marilyn R. Wolf Collection. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
5. Norouzi Gharagheshlagh, Hossein, Zakariaee kermani, Iman. (2016). Review the jewelry of Turkmen women by emphasizing on the concepts of motifs in culture. Medwell journal