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**Research Paper**

## **An Investigation on the Art of Goldsmiths and its Developments in Safavid Era**

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### **Abstract**

In the art of goldsmiths during Safavid era, some developments in terms of the two levels of techniques and products are witnessed. The mentioned developments, considering the influence of factors affecting the government structure and society, as well as foreign relations, took a coherent and distinct form. This research aims to determine the elements of developments in the structure of the form and techniques of the art of goldsmiths in the context of two important approaches of Safavid period, which are the artistic relations with east and west and the government's support from art. The questions that this research seeks to answer are: What are the developments in the form and technique of the art of goldsmiths in Safavid period? What was the effect of cultural and artistic exchanges with India and Europe on the evolution of goldsmiths' works and techniques of this period? Therefore, the research type is qualitative and historical, with analytical-descriptive methods considering the study of evidence and resources. Moreover, the findings of the research illustrated that the art of goldsmiths in Safavid era had many developments in terms of techniques and methods in the face of European art, and with the arrival of European goldsmiths and jewelers to Iran, significant innovations occurred in the special techniques of this art, including diamond cutting, filigree art, making fine and wide gold strings, and gold-gluing technique in wall painting. However, at the level of political influence during Safavid era, especially during the era of Shah Abbas I, goldsmiths had played crucial role due to their professional qualifications and prestige.

**Keywords:** art of goldsmiths, Safavid period, techniques, filigree work, artistic relations.

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## 1. Introduction

Safavid period, as the longest lasting and most effective period in the history of Islamic Iran, was the era of flourishing of various arts. In this period, society, religion, economy, and politics each found specific structures, and the necessity to differentiate with other countries by formalizing the Shia religion and protecting Safavid family from rivals, has strengthened these preparations. Thus, the field of art was always supported by Safavid government, regardless of jurisprudential or taste constraints. Additionally, one of the consequences of this distinction was a change in the approach and work process of artisans and artists. Despite the gradual growth of industries and arts until the period of Shah Abbas I, this growth was subject to the personal interests and tastes of the kings more than any other factor and did not follow a coherent policy. However, during the period of Shah Abbas Safavi, a kind of policymaking at different artistic and industrial levels happened, which caused development in the arts and the way artists work. The establishment and development of industrial workshops and royal factories created an opportunity for art to have innovative and creative components along with religious, political and social developments and trade relations with east and west.

The art of goldsmiths is an abandoned and at the same time an important art that has witnessed the least developments in the several thousand years of Iran life due to the uniformity of its materials and methods of education. Therefore, the art of goldsmiths in Iran have had the least development in terms of manufacturing techniques and the most variety in terms of role and design. It is worth mentioning that one of the research difficulties in the field of art of goldsmiths is the lack of resources and historical information and the loss of works related to this art. This is much more complicated due to the fact that the value of old and new gold is constant and gold works are melted down several times to create new works.

This research aims to determine the elements of developments in the structure of the form and techniques of the art of goldsmiths in the context of two important approaches of Safavid period, which are the artistic relations with east and west

and the government's support from art. The questions that this research seeks to answer are: what are the developments in the form and technique of the art of goldsmiths in Safavid period? What was the effect of cultural and artistic exchanges with India and Europe on the evolution of goldsmiths' works and techniques of this period? The type of research is qualitative and historical and it was done through analytical-descriptive method and study of evidence and resources. In this way, the information required to answer the questions of this research has been collected through documents and library resources and aspects of the subject have been analyzed by describing the relevant data. On the whole, the findings of the research illustrated the artistic developments in the technique and quality of goldsmiths' works as a result of cultural and artistic exchanges with west, and with the arrival of European jewelry artists to Iran, there was a development in some goldsmiths' techniques and practices, such as diamond cutting and gilding.

## 2. Literature Review

Mirjafari and Seyyed Bankdar (2008) in the article " Art of goldsmiths and jewelry making in Safavid era" with the aim of clarifying the art of goldsmiths and jewelry making and their uses in Iran during Safavid era, have discussed the role of this art in the politics and civilization of Safavid era. Although, the article mostly describes the art of goldsmiths and its importance in Safavid period and the state of resources and necessary materials for this art, but goldsmiths and their social and political role have not been paid attention to. "Art and power in Safavid era", is the title of Hasan Shahi's thesis (2015), which considers one of the main uses of art in Safavid era to be the display of the power, authority and legitimacy of this dynasty. Therefore, Safavid kings supported art and artists against religious constraints and jurisprudential interpretations. Calligraphy, painting, music and architecture are some of the art fields that have been considered and investigated in this thesis. Mohtsham (2016) in the article "Technical Study of Gilding Ornaments on Stone Inscriptions of Vanak Church in Isfahan" has discussed an example of gilding techniques in Safavid era, which is " gilding " technique and "oil gilding" method. In

addition, the method of implementing this technique, which is one of the specialties of Safavid period goldsmith art, has been explained.

### 3. Safavid era art of goldsmiths, techniques and works

Art of goldsmiths<sup>2</sup> is the skill and specialization in making all kinds of gold and jewelry artefacts. This skill can include the science of designing, molding and making all kinds of gold and jewelry artefacts, as well as knowing precious stones and using them in making gold artefacts. The guild of goldsmiths includes a chain of jobs related to gold and silver which are: wire makers, goldsmiths, jewelers, goldbeaters, gold makers, makers of gold and silver badges, silversmiths, chaser and engravers (Kivani: 49), illuminator, table-makers and lapis lazuli washers (Nawai, 1989: 360), silversmiths, enamellers, jewel cutters and coinage workers.

Based on archaeological data and studies, seemingly ornamental objects and beads, sometimes with religious uses, have been interesting for human societies since ancient times. It seems that having luxury items was a kind of social value in ancient societies, as during the excavations of the burnt city, graves of artisans and artists such as jewelers, painters and stonemasons were found. (Seyd Sajjadi, 2003: 11)

Many art history researchers are of the opinion that Iranian metalworking flourished during the Sassanid period. Silver was one of the metals that was widely used at this time. Ghirshman, while emphasizing the suitability of silvery dishes and the splendor of the Sassanid court, examined and divided them into categories based on their variety of uses and shapes, including frames, bowls, round or boat-shaped cups with smooth or curved edges, beakers and jugs, and so on. Moreover, rhytons in the shape of horse heads, gazelle heads, saddled and equipped horses, busts of kings and inlaid golden pendants, which confirm the significant progress of metalworking in this era, are added to these items. (Krimian and Khan Moradi, 2011: 112)

<sup>2</sup> In the word goldsmith means jewel maker and the one who makes tools from gold, wire and jewels. (Dehkhoda, 1998: 9/12837), Sayaghat means goldsmith (ibid.: 10/15110) and Saigh means goldsmith (ibid.: 14727/10).

Apart from architecture, the major success of Iranian genius in the art of the Islamic era is in the fields that are called "minor arts" (Arberry, 1957: 203). Carpet weaving, art of goldsmiths and silversmiths, illuminations and gilding are among these small arts or in other words fine arts. Linking art with life (Pope, 2018: 1) and matching people's needs and desires (Rochechouart, 1999: 179) are its main features. Regardless of the time and place of its appearance, Iranian art follows a kind of unity in meaning: "Anyone who wants to examine Iranian art should keep this point in mind from the beginning that all disciplines and branches of Iranian art obey each other and follow the same process. (ibid: 182) In Safavid period, two general trends had an impact on the flow of art and artistic productions: First, the art field of Safavid era was a variable dependent on the most powerful institution of the society, which was the center of political power; additionally, the growth and prosperity of various arts in this era is largely due to the support and companionship of the governing institute. There are many evidences of the supporting role of the court in the creation and prosperity of various arts, which shows that the support or non-support of the power institution has always had the most effective and obvious influence on the field of art creation and art education regarding Safavid art. As there is a story about Shah Tahmasab that two court painters forged his seal and misused it, although the punishment for this crime was the loss of their lives, but Shah Tahmasab imposed a light punishment on them because of their artistry. (Ali Effendi, 1990: 105).

The second general trend is the expansion of communication and cultural and artistic exchanges with west and east. From the period of Shah Tahmasab, cultural and artistic relations with India developed, and from the period of Shah Abbas I, cultural and artistic exchange with Europe developed. The arrival of European jewelers to Iran from the period of Shah Abbas I onwards (Sibylla Schuster Walser, 1985: 63) increased this exchange. The concentration and integrity of the organization of Safavid government caused significant developments in many arts to occur in these exchanges.

The abandonment of the art of goldsmiths in most historical periods of Iran is one of the points that has made research about this art difficult. This is due to the different approaches of governments toward the category of art. Although some arts such as painting, miniatures and book design have embraced significant development due to the connection with Europe and the interest of Safavid sultans, but in fine arts such as gilding<sup>3</sup>, despite the great interest of Safavid sultans in gold and silver utensils and tools, no significant technical evolution has occurred. As long as the works of Iranian goldsmiths did not attract the attention of European observers: "Goldsmiths do not do the work extremely beautiful" (Careri, 1969: 148). "Iranian goldsmiths work badly; the goldsmith industry has no attraction and development except for filigree which is better than their other goldsmith works" (Tavernier, 1957: 600). This issue continued until Qajar era and the French Rochechouart, who visited Iran during Nasrid era, repeated Tavernier's statement about the art of goldsmiths: "Iranian goldsmiths are not very skilled in their work, and the jewels they make are ugly. They put useless stones on rough gems and frames that have no beauty or sophistication. The reason for that is that Iranian goldsmiths consider the stone that is used in jewelry to be the main decorative element" (Rochechouart: 184). But by evaluating some goldsmith works left from Safavid period, significant innovation can be seen which is different from the above results. Among these works, the following can be mentioned:

"1- Eleven gold plaques on which Persian poems are written in Nastaliq script. These writings are the works of Alireza Abbasi, who were commissioned by Shah Abbas I to decorate the Imam Reza Mosque in Mashhad.

2- Small objects of precious metals that Mayer has mentioned in the book "List of metalwork", including a silvery cup belonging to the year 1063 AH, whose maker is Taghi Gilani and also

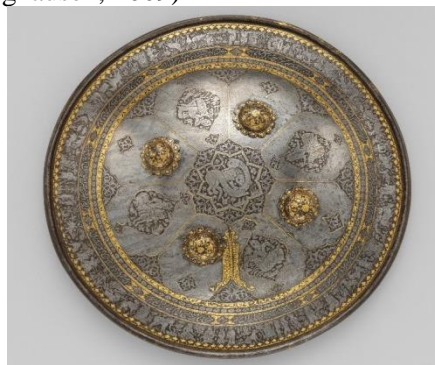
a bowl with a silver rim that dates back to 1130 AH and was made by Yar Mohammad.

3- The treasure of metal vessels in the court of Shah Abbas and his successors, which surprised European tourists such as Della Valle and Olearius. (Alan, 2012: 36)

4- In 1010 AH, Shah Abbas repaired the building of Astan Quds Razavi, the great calligrapher Alireza Tabrizi was in charge of overseeing this repair, and he wrote the inscriptions of Mubarak and Khwaja Rabi quadrangles in Thuluth script, and the golden plates around the shrine, which were made by master goldsmith Mustali, are decorated with his Nastaliq script. (Manshi Qomi, 1973: 126) Inside the margin of the inscription, it is written in hidden Nastaliq script in a small frame: "The work of Kamal al-Din Mahmoud Nazli Yazdi 1015"; Kamal al-Din Mahmoud Yazdi was probably the famous goldsmith of Astan Razavi in the period of Shah Abbas. The one who is mentioned in the documents of Astan Quds in 1011 A.H. with the name of Amir Mahmoud Zargar, the repairer of seat of Imam Reza shrine (AS) (Naqdi, 2012: 526).

5- Steel items such as belts, plaques and badges have open decorations that are sometimes inlaid with gold and silver. One of the belts in Topkapi Museum has the name of Shah Ismail I and the date 913 A.H., as well as silver bottles that are inlaid with gold and some are decorated with jewels and precious stones such as ruby, turquoise and emerald. (Dimand, 1986: 153)

6- 16th century shield inlaid with gold. This shield was gifted to *Mikhail Fyodorovich Romanov* in 1031 AH. This shield, which is exquisitely decorated with complex figure designs, is the only example of its kind. (Ettinghausen, 2009)



<sup>3</sup> Gilding is a decorative method of applying a very thin covering of gold to solid surfaces such as metal, wood, porcelain or stone. As a branch of goldsmith art, gold gilding is more widespread in arts and industries and even medicine.

Regarding the work techniques of Iranian goldsmiths, by reviewing internal and foreign resources and some surviving works, it is possible to understand the art and work techniques of goldsmith artists in this period to some extent, a part of which is mentioned:

Filigree work, which is a fine art, in which metal objects were made with silver and gold wire or belts and in beautiful and varied patterns. It is noteworthy that this art was very prosperous during this period. In particular, "laying these wires and belts with very small welds required extreme precision" (Hatam and Alizadeh Mirarklai, 2014, A: 31).

Filigree work had significant innovations in Safavid era, including: more use of silver, using single-layer warped and rolled underlays, the use of Zebreh Kari<sup>4</sup> along with filigree work, the production of filigree works on flat and curved surfaces, the use of walls and thick decorative components next to the internal and delicate components, and the inability of filigree makers to produce large shapes. (Hatam and Alizadeh Mirar Kalai, 2014, B: 124)

Painting and the art of goldsmiths were another artistic field in this regard, and goldsmith-painter artists created beautiful works in this period, which attracted foreign observers, and Adam Olearius says in the description of the tomb of Sheikh Safi al-Din in Ardabil: "Through the corridor on the right side, we were led to a large room that was painted with gold on its walls and looked like a place of worship" (Olearius, 1984: 129), people like Mohammad Qoli Beg and Kalbali Nader are mentioned as goldsmiths-painters in this period (Nasrabadi, 1980: 329).

#### **4. Development and evolution of goldsmith art in Safavid era**

Making fine and wide gold strings is one of the other developments in the art of goldsmiths in Safavid era. According to Chardin, with the help of die tool, goldsmiths made a 900-cubic-meter-long string from a piece of gold bullion. This string, which was as thin as the tip of a pin, was wound on spindles, and for its durability and

strength, delicate and very thick Gilding was used. (Chardin, 1957: 4/335) Also, gem cutters used a wheel that included two parts of emery and one part of lac for cutting jewelry, and they believed that the technique of building wheels is very important and they put a lot of effort into its installation. (Ibid.: 4/345)

Among the common decorations in architecture is the technique of gilding in the form of mural painting, which is also seen in techniques such as pastiglia and gilding on rests such as stone, glass, and wood. Examples of these decorations can be seen in Vank church during Safavid era. (Ahmadi et al., 2011: 2) On both sides of the north door of the church, there are two stone inscriptions with dimensions of approximately 30 x 45 cm on each of them, a text in Armenian along with decorative motifs is carved. All the prominent motifs of these inscriptions are decorated with gilding and sometimes coloring. (Mohatsham, 2016: 83)

It should be noted that, covering doors with gold grew a lot in Safavid period. In a research, J. W. Allan pointed out the most important silver covering of the doors of Safavid era, and by emphasizing the tomb of Sheikh Safi-al-Din Ardabili in Ardabil, he considers the construction techniques and its details. "On the first of Rajab month, Shah Abbas I gave four thousand tomans to metal workers to build the doors and windows of the monastery. He ordered that all the windows and doors be made of gold and silver... the oldest of them is the entrance door that was built in 1011 and is known as the door of Zulfikar Khan. Probably, this was a gift from Zulfikar Khan Gurbanlu, the governor of Ardabil, who was executed in 1018." Amir Khan Ardabili and Mohammad Hasan Zargar were among the goldsmiths who were mentioned in covering the doors. After carefully examining the patterns of the doors, Allan concludes that the techniques and patterns found in the covering of the doors can also be seen in the carpets, silk carpets, fabrics and gold embroideries of that period. (Allen: 36-42)

The personal interests of the kings regarding jewelry making were an effective incentive for the art of goldsmiths. Shah Abbas II's interest in jewelry design (Tavernier: 491) and Shah Abbas I's desire to increase his gold stock (Matthee,

<sup>4</sup> Using small solid gold or silver balls and connecting them with very fine welds to the outer surface of a metal object is called Zebreh Kari. (Adam Olearius)

2008: 65) are among these. In addition, Safavid kings were very fond of horses and their decoration. According to Nicolas Sanson, Safavid Shah Suleiman was very fond of decorating the saddles and equipment of his horses: "Each of these horses is worth as much as a treasury full of jewels, because the stirrups of these horses are all made of gold, the mouths and breastplates and the front and back parts of the saddles are also all made of gold... Each of these horses has two gold tubs in front of it... (Sanson, 1967: 82-83)."

### 5. Shiite identity in goldsmith art

Evaluation of the remaining works and the descriptions given in the historical sources can be concluded as the claimed that goldsmiths had a significant presence in Safavid court, and the ideological and authoritarian discourse of Safavid had a dominant influence on the productions and the working way of its artists. Accordingly, artworks reflect the identity of the society in the historical period of their emergence due to their deep connection with the cultural, social and religious areas of the society in which they are produced. In Safavid era, when Shiite religion was one of the main pillars of its legitimacy, the works of art and the way artists acted were aligned in this direction, and this was apart from the belief and adherence of the artists to the ideological discourse of Safavid dynasty. Furthermore, Safavid kings used artists and artistic productions in the direction of competition, aggrandizement, display of power, consecration and seeking legitimacy.

The rivalry between Safavid court and the courts of Delhi and Istanbul was the reason for the exchange of gifts with the aim of showing the greatness and power of the government to the neighbors and emphasis on distinct political and religious identity. Gifts of silk and jewelry were predominant in this regard (Turkman, 1971/2: 783). For instance, to congratulate Sultan Selim II on his accession, Shah Tahmasab sent huge gifts that were carried on 19 thousand camels to Constantinople, among which there were plenty of jewels, woven fabrics and painted and gilded divans. (Kavir, 2016: 415) Even in the internal relations of the rulers of Iran with Safavid court, which often took place with the aim of maintaining the situation and position, the

priority was with gifts of gold and silver (Afushte-ai Natanzi, 1994: 155). Safavid kings were familiar with a stronger aspect of art, and that was the advertising power of art; therefore, by hiring a group of the best artists of their time and creating diverse works of art, they used art as a powerful medium to increase their political and social legitimacy and dominance, both in internal relations of power and in foreign relations.

Consequently, the shine of gold and silver was definitely a tool to show the power, wealth and greatness of the courts. In describing the ceremonies of Shah Safi's court, Adam Olearius states: "... they also arranged large golden goblets for drinking wine at a distance from each other and emptied more than three hundred golden jugs of wine and put them in a corner to show. Whenever a person turns his face, he sees nothing but gold..." (Olearius: 198). Apart from the jewelry that was used for personal use, Safavid court and palaces were full of containers and utensils made of gold and decorated with precious stones. Golden and studded dishes were the usual tableware of Safavid kings (Della Valle, 1991: 236; 8). It should be noticed that, these luxuries and dishes amazed the tourists and ambassadors (Chardin: 4/198). As an example, in the silver stamping and engraving of jars, candlesticks, and censers, Persian writing with beautiful lines replaced Arabic manuscripts; except for the verses of Qur'an and the 12 Imams and the Fourteen Infallibles, which were heavily influenced by Shi'a during this period, and their writing was mostly in Naskh and Thuluth calligraphy. (Taj Bakhsh, 1999: 216) Prayers and especially parts of "Nad Ali" prayer were engraved in dishes and candlesticks. (Afrogh, 2011: 44-45)

Using the art of goldsmiths for the sanctity of buildings and religious and family tombs with the aim of deepening religious legitimacy was one of the other reasons for paying attention to the art of goldsmiths. Olearius describes the tomb of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili as follows: "The grid of the shrine was made entirely of thick tubes of pure gold and from behind it, the tomb of Sheikh Safi could be seen... above the tomb, there were some golden lamps hanging, and on the sides of it were two tall golden candlesticks.... the golden door of the shrine was locked..." (Olearius: 128).

Iskandar Beg Turkman considers Shah Tahmasab's works to be: "The gilding of the blessed dome (Imam Reza's court) and the gold molding of the head pole of the dome" (Turkman/1: 124). To fulfill this issue, he spent "189 kilograms of gold for the dome and 51 kilograms for the head pole of the dome" (Afushte-ai Natanzi: 15).

#### **4. Continuity of restrictions in the art of goldsmiths**

The historical and natural limitations of the art of goldsmiths, which were caused by the shortage of gold and silver mines in Iran (Careri: 36), became more evident in Safavid period. Shah Abbas made a lot of efforts to solve this problem, but because "his expenses were more than his income, so he gave up on this idea" (Tavernier: 364). Therefore, the required gold and silver were often imported from Europe, Abyssinia, Sumatra Island, Peru (only silver) and China. In addition, gold and silver were brought from Japan in exchange for silk. (Tavernier: 540-544) The largest amount of gold and silver bullions needed by Iran was imported from the Ottoman territory and to a lesser extent from Russia. The main brokers who were in charge of importing bullion were mostly Armenians. The import of bullion was apparently a very profitable business because the importers made a profit of 20%. (Matthee: 56) Safavid government had a strict control over the export of gold from the country, including in 1056 AH, Shah Abbas II issued a decree banning the export of gold bullion (ibid: 69).

The lack of gold and silver caused the abuse of some courtiers and even foreigners. One of the French people in the court deceived the Prime Minister of Shah Abbas II, Muhammad Beg Etimad al-Dawlah and received a huge amount from the court under the pretext of discovering and extracting gold and silver mines for ten years, but he did not do any significant work (Tavernier: 544). Additionally, Mohammad Beg built a mansion called Madan Khaneh in the royal palace complex for gold and silver mining, which was left unfinished after his death. (Chardin, 1966:7/177) The aforementioned dependence in general caused limitations in goldsmiths' technique and work methods in the historical course of this art in Iran. In addition,

the few gold and silver mines discovered in Iran were owned by the government and were personally supervised by Safavid kings. All gold and silver extracted was the king's share (Moshizi, 1990: 60).

#### **5. Interactions of goldsmith art with Eastern and Western art**

Cultural and artistic interactions and exchanges with India were very prosperous during the first period of Shah Tahmasab. King Humayun's trip to Iran in 951 A.H. created a new movement in Indian painting because he asked Shah Tahmasab for permission to take a group of artists, especially painters, to India with him. Shah Tahmasab agreed, and he hired a number of painters and goldsmiths, including Khwaja Abdul Samad Zarin Qalam, Master Mansour known as Mir Musavvir, Mir seyed Ali Musavvir, Maulana Farsi, Dost Mohammad Musavvir, Dervish Mohammad, Master Yusuf, Qasim Mazhab, Fakhr Sahaf and Master Yunus Zargar. Moreover, some other artists who had the desire to travel to India went to India. (Manshi Qomi: 41) During Safavid era, goldsmiths entered Iran from India and their works were so brilliant that among the gifts of Shah Abbas to Ottoman sultan, Iskandar Beg mentions: "Pomander of white amber weighing one thousand eight hundred mesghaal, which skillfull Indian goldsmiths have placed in a mesh container of 21 kg of red gold using strange techniques..." (Turkman/2: 821) Accordingly, Nasrabadi often mentions the migration of Iranian goldsmiths to India. "Rashida Zargar is from Abbas Abad, Isfahan who was unique in the art of goldsmiths and enamel work.... also, peerless.... he went to India and returned after some time and with the credit of his industry, he served King Kamal". (Nasrabadi: 389) In the battle of Chaldoran, after the occupation of Tabriz, Sultan Selim I ordered to send a thousand artists and masters of industries "who were unique masters in their art" to Constantinople.<sup>5</sup> (Hammer-Purgstall, 1988: 2: 847)

During Safavid period, cultural and artistic relations and interactions were not established in

<sup>5</sup> Angello wrote this number as seven hundred households. (Barbaro and others, 1970: 330)

an official and systematic way and in line with a cultural diplomacy, and the issue which took place in the form of artistic interactions was mostly the result of the fleeting interests of Safavid kings or the travels of European tourists and political officials. From the period of Shah Abbas, with the expansion of Iran's political and commercial relations with European governments, extensive artistic exchanges were formed, some foreign products such as firearms were imported to Iran, and some artistic products such as expensive weapons and jewelry were exported from Iran to Europe. (Rochechouart: 167) In another way, in addition to the exchange of goods and products, European artists and craftsmen entered Iran and provided the basis for development in the production of artistic goods. As Musa Beyg, the ambassador of Shah Abbas I in 1626 AD/1035 AH, asked Dutch prince to allow him to take 15 Dutch artists with him to Iran, but Dutch Council of States only agreed to send 5 to 6 artists. (Flor, 1977: 51) There are references in the sources about the presence of European goldsmiths in the court of Shah Abbasi I. Among them, two vitreous enamel worker and goldsmith were hired, both of whom were French (Tavernier: 578-579).

Among Safavid kings, Shah Abbas II was interested in the art of goldsmiths and was very skilled in jewelry design. (Tavernier, 1957: 473) During his time, significant developments took place in the art of goldsmiths. By his order, Shah Tahmasab's mansion was changed and turned into two royal factories or workshops and one of these workshops was assigned to goldsmiths (Chardin: 7/177) and goldsmiths who were hired from France and Holland worked there. Diamond cutting and watch making were among the goldsmiths' techniques that according to Chardin, Iranian artists did not have much expertise in (ibid.: 4/335). Hence, Shah Abbas II allocated a separate building from Shah Tahmasab's mansion to a diamond cutting workshop, and in one case, a diamond worth 200,000 Eko was cut by an Armenian diamond cutter. In addition, in 1656/1065 A.H. (the period of Shah Abbas II), six French craftsmen, among whom were watchmakers and goldsmiths, worked in the court with a small salary of about 30 Pfennig per year. (Schuster Walser: 63) One of Tavernier's

companions on his trip to Iran mentions the goldsmith he brought with him to Iran (Tavernier: 273-274) and elsewhere he mentions Dutch diamonds cutter in Isfahan. (ibid: 472) On the other hand, Sanson mentions the presence of French goldsmiths and watchmakers and their prestige in the court of King Suleiman: "The king also pays for their food, which is a large amount, and the king loves these workers so much and cares about their work that he does not want them to work for anyone else but him" (Sanson: 93)

However, the resources do not mention the work style and influences of European artists on the art of goldsmiths, especially in the case of watchmaking, which did not have much background in Iranian art and had entered the Iranian court during this period. But, due to the entry of artistic words into European languages in this period, it is possible to understand the scope of artistic influence and exchange. For instance, Pietro Della Valle considers the word " Agiamina " which is used in Italy for gold and silver plating on metals to be derived from the name of Ajam (Iran): "As I see a lot of works like these here, but none of them are as beautiful as the works in Italy." (Della Valle: 50)

Another field of artistic relations in the art of goldsmiths was the evaluation and pricing of jewels and gold objects in the court. According to Jean Chardin, European appraisers were superior to Iranian goldsmiths. Apparently, during Safavid era, there were no competent goldsmiths in the country, so Safavid kings used foreign goldsmiths. (Chardin, 1957/3: 179)

## 6. Goldsmiths' guild structure

The resources of Safavid period have mentioned prominent dignitaries and officials who were goldsmiths and had a great influence on the political affairs of that period. Artists who were not in the guild structure of Safavid period, but they played a role in the power structure of Safavid due to their profession and art. Amir Najm goldsmith, who was one of the most important goldsmiths in the beginning of Shah Ismail's rise to power, is one of the most important goldsmiths of Safavid period, who played a very important role in Shah Ismail's rise to power. According to Hasan Rumlu, he had a shop in Shah Ismail's neighborhood (near Rasht's



White Mosque) and attracted Shah Ismail's attention by offering gifts (Rumlu, 1968:8). His good conduct and professional reputation were very effective in attracting the attention and trust of Shah Ismail (Hosseini, 2000:41-42). By using his job income and what he received after his political careers, he got so much wealth that: "the number of his special retainers was close to four thousand armed horsemen. The treasure of his property is beyond the count, that every day there were a hundred sheep in his kitchen, and... the utensils of his assembly were all gold, silver and chinese dish..." (Ibid: 44). In 914 A.H., Shah Ismail<sup>6</sup> appointed him to the position of "Amir al-Omarai to consider the affairs of Guarded Domains, and his seal was put on top of the seal of all princes in High Court." (Qazvini, 1936: 250 and Hosseini: 37). Mir Njam Zargar's political status was more than a sign of the power and prestige of the guild, but it was a sign of complex emotional relationships with Shah Ismail. There is no mention of his artistry in the resources, and most of them state that he was a close friend and disciple of the Shah.

Allahverdi Beyg Zargars, who held the position of goldsmith during Safavid era of Shah Abbas I, had a much higher political position than his job as a goldsmith. The beginning of his political life was at the end of Mohammad Khodabanda's reign (Falsafi, 1968/1: 110) and after that he joined Shah Abbas I. His prominent role in the murder of Murshid Qoli khan Stajlu led to his elevation in the court of Shah Abbas and he was given the title of Sultan and the position of Amir. (ibid: 145-146) In addition, the government of Golpayegan was entrusted to him. (Hosseini Astarabadi: 144) In the event of Shah Abbas moving to Sulaymaniyah and negotiating with the rebellious Khan of the castle there named Yaqoob Khan, Allahverdi Beyg along with Hossein Khan went to negotiate with him and

forced him to surrender. (Afushte-ai Natanzi: 324)

The supervision of Safavid government over guilds, including the guild of goldsmiths, was exercised through the position of "Bashi". Bashi people were the link between guilds and the government and supervised the administrative organization of that guild. Bashi people of Isfahan were in charge of their guilds throughout Guarded Domains. (Kiwani, 2013: 89) The appointment of Bashians is generally confirmed by the royal decree and in the states by the ruler's decree. (ibid.) This increased the interference and supervision of the government on the work of trade guilds.

The government's need for goldsmith's artefacts caused a close relationship between the government and local authorities with goldsmiths. One of the constant presence of goldsmiths in courts was the position of being goldsmith (Zargar Bashi). Zargar Bashi supervised the affairs of goldsmiths and goldsmiths of the court, determining and evaluating the price of precious gifts, making and executing gold and silver works and objects, covering and plating other metals with gold and silver, etc. The author of Rostam al-Tawarikh considers the holder of this position to be at the same level as a mullah, a sage, an astrologer, and a writer (Rostam al-Hakma, 1970: 100). One of the main duties of this job, mentioned by Tavernier and Chardin, was to evaluate and estimate the price of jewels that Shah and his family bought from foreign and domestic jewelers. or the price of their old-fashioned jewelry that they want sell to others. According to Tavernier, the goldsmith used to receive 2% legal fees for the appraisal of the items sold to the king. (Tavernier, 457-458) Zargar Bashi performed his duty under the supervision of the general supervisor (or Etimad al-Dawlah). It also should be mentioned that under the supervision of Zargar Bashi were people like Mirza Siah Nevis, jewelers who each specialized in recognizing a type of precious stone, and goldsmiths who were skilled in recognizing gold and silver. They used to estimate and evaluate jewelry. Sometimes foreign jewelers and goldsmiths, especially Indian and Armenian, were used for very fine jewelry appraisal.

<sup>6</sup> According to Astarabadi, this appointment happened in 915 AH (Hosseini Astarabadi, 1988:41). However, he mentions the position of attorney, but in the book of Ilchi Nizam Shah, the appointment of Mir Najam Zargar to the position of attorney in 909 AH and the appointment of Amir al-Omrai in 914 are mentioned. (Hosseini, 2000: 17 and 37) Savory and Sarvar have mentioned the appointment of Mir Najam to the position of attorney in 913 AH and after the dismissal of Hossein Beyg Lallah. (Savory, 2003: 114 and Sarvar, 1996: 67)

(Tavernier: 457-461 and Chardin/3: 119-105 and 179-180) Apparently, there was not much supervision of goldsmiths' work. (Tavernier: 472-479 and 536-538) Zargar Bashi supervised all the affairs that took place in the goldsmiths' house. However, inspecting and determining the price of jewelry was his main duty. He supervised all jewelers and goldsmiths of Isfahan and received 2% of the jewels that were sold to the court and 1% of what was traded in the city. He had the right to enter the court freely (Mirza Esmia, 2000:111). Although Moayer al-Malik had great supervision over the art of goldsmiths and mint affairs, this supervision was general and superficial. (Ibid.: 22) Moreover, it has to be mentioned that, even Moayer al-Malik did not need to be specialized in this job. Muhammad Beyg, one of the most important Moayer al-Malik of Safavid era, who was first promoted to the position of Moayer Bashi and then to the position of Etimad al-Dawlah during the reign of Shah Abbas II, was originally the son of a tailor from the people of Tabriz and he also specialized in tailoring and mining exploration (Tavernier: 551). Moayer Bashi had representatives throughout Iran who supervised the production of precious metals (Mirza Esmia: 110).

The governors of the states and provinces also had royal factories in imitation of Safavid court, and most of the court positions were there, as Nasrabadi mentions Nowruz Ali Beyg Shamlu, who is "proficient in the art of goldsmiths" as the jeweler of Abbas Qali khan, the ruler of Herat. (Nasrabadi: 391)

## 7. Conclusion

The art of goldsmiths in Safavid period developed significantly due to political, economic and social issues. From the political point of view, the centralist Safavid rule and the connection with Europe, India and Ottoman Empire, as well as the deep interest of Safavid kings in the art of goldsmiths and jewelry making, and from the economic point of view, providing security, expanding domestic and foreign trade, caused the development of this art. Also, from a political point of view, goldsmiths were influential in the social and political relations of the country. The presence of goldsmiths such as Amir Najam Rashti and

Allahverdi Beyg Zargar Bashi at high administrative and political levels is a sign of the great influence of this trade in the political life of Safavid Iran.

In terms of techniques and works, Iranian jewelry lacks artistic elegance so much that it has not attracted the attention of western observers. However, it is comprehended that until the reign of Shah Abbas I Safavid, when foreign artists had not come to Iran before, this art was still based on its traditional foundations, which had seen a slight development in Timurid period. However, a developmental sign regarding the art of goldsmiths in the style and technique from the time of Shah Abbas I onwards has been mentioned in the resources. Among these developments, we can mention the combination of enamel and gold, the tendency to cut diamonds and filigree, and the attention of Iranian goldsmiths to watchmaking. The monopoly of the raw materials of this industry to the ruler and those in power and the movement of the great masters of this industry along with the ruler and in Safavid period along with the transfer of the capital are other effective factors in the life of this art. In addition to playing role and creativity in their profession, goldsmith artists presented significant works and with the expansion of cultural and artistic exchanges with the west, they experienced many developments in work methods and techniques.

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