

Original Research ArticleSahar Zekavat¹

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URL: paykareh.scu.ac.ir/article_15880.html**A comparative study of the metal candlestick images in the paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb and similar examples of Islamic periods (Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid periods)****Abstract**

Problem definition: Metal candlestick is one of the most widely used accessory for providing lighting and one of the common tools of the past periods whose images are abundantly depicted in the Shahnameh's paintings and the display of these objects has always been of interest to the artists. The present study aims to investigate the general characteristics of the candlestick images in the paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb and explore the commonalities and differences between these images and examples of handmade and metal candlesticks of the Islamic period, especially in the "Seljuk", "Ilkhanid", "Timurid" and "Safavid" periods. The present study will finally answer the question that the candlestick image in the paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb is more similar to the handmade works of which of the studied periods.

Objective: To identify the style and context of objects and elements of Iranian paintings in order to perceive the mental influences of ancient Iranian artists in their lifetime.

Research Method: The research data has been collected in the library-documentary form and investigated using descriptive-analytical method and a comparative approach. The present samples were taken using purposive sampling method and from 18 types of candlesticks associated with different periods of the Iranian government, 2 have been selected from the Seljuk, 10 from Ilkhanid and Timurid and 6 from Safavid periods. Also, the statistical population of the examined paintings includes 174 drawings in the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb, published by the Academy of Arts, of which the images of 4 candlesticks have been identified in 4 ones.

Results: The results indicated that the candlestick samples of the Shahnameh paintings do not resemble the metal handmade ones belonging to the Safavid period and there are many differences between the images and samples of this period. The candlestick samples of Safavid period are cylindrical, but other ones have a polygonal base. The general characteristics of these candlesticks are more similar to the hand-made ones belonging to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods.

Keywords: metal candlestick, Shahnameh of Tahmasbi, Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid, Safavid

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Introduction

Ancient manuscripts and historical writings are considered as important sources of social, political, cultural and artistic information of any society. Among the most important artworks, one can point out to the "Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb" belonging to the Safavid period. The paintings of this Shahnameh actually narrate the governing situation and conditions of Safavid Iran and one can investigate the society of that period from different aspects by exploring these drawings. Practical utensils and consumables are among the subjects that Safavid painters were not unaware of depicting. Metal candlesticks are an example of these practical utensils which can also be observed in the paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb. The main purpose of this study is to identify the images of metal candlesticks in the drawings of this Shahnameh and to match these images with the examples of metal candlesticks belonging to the Islamic period. Attempts have been made to answer these questions: To what extent do the images of these candlesticks comply with the common metal specimens in the Safavid period? To which period's hand-made and metal samples are they similar to? The hypothesis expected by the scholars is that the samples of candlesticks depicted in the paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb are taken from the Safavid era's handicrafts. That is, the pictorial examples of the Safavid version are a direct reflection of the metal handicrafts of this era.

Research method

The necessary information has been collected in the library-documentary form and investigated using descriptive-analytical method and a comparative approach. The research samples were taken using purposive sampling method and from 18 types of candlesticks belonging to different periods of the Iranian government, 2 have been selected from the Seljuk, 10 from Ilkhanid and Timurid and 6 from Safavid periods. Moreover, the statistical population of the examined paintings includes 174 drawings in the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb, published by the Academy of Arts, of which the images of 4 candlesticks have been identified in 4 ones.

Research background

To the best of the author's knowledge, no study has been conducted on examining the candlestick images in the paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb and matching them with the handmade samples. Regarding the subject of Islamic candlesticks, one can refer to the study carried out by "Fardpour" (2011) which describes the production method, formology as well as the characteristics of candlesticks associated with different Islamic periods. "Sabilan" (2014) also referred to issues such as the form and aesthetics of Safavid candlesticks and chandeliers. "Mansouri Jazabadi" (2017) analyzed and compared the human

motifs in the artworks of the Metropolitan Museum. In another study, "the forms and motifs of the Safavid and Timurid candlesticks have been investigated" (Rostami and Shateri, 2016). "Azarmdel" (2015) presented "a comparative study on the forms and decorations of the metal candlesticks' bases belonging to the Khorasan's Timurid and Safavid periods".

Candlesticks of the Islamic periods (Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid periods)

In Iranian metallurgy, the fabrication of candlestick bases is very old, and in the meantime, manufacturing metal candlesticks has been also of high importance. The first examples of candlesticks are in the form of pottery and the oldest type belongs to the early sixth millennium BC. Very precious metal candlesticks have also survived from the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid periods, which are very valuable in terms of the form and motifs (Fardpour, 2011, 98-97). The metal candlesticks are classified into two categories of large and wide and cylindrical and columnar designs in terms of the general form (Rostami and Shateri, 2016, 711). In the early Islamic period, metal candlesticks were often produced with very large and heavy structures and shapes with wide and sometimes concave cylindrical bodies. Some candlesticks produced in the first two early Islamic centuries had bulky polygonal and cylindrical base and body, and the upper part designed for dripping the candle drops, was made of larger radius than the neck, and in general, the elegance of these samples were more than the previous ones. Also, the shape of candlesticks became much more diverse in the Timurid period, and the base and body of these objects were often produced with bulges, curvatures, convexities and concaves. In the Safavid period, the fabrication of candlesticks in the form of long and uniform cylinders became common and curvy as well as bulky forms with different diameters are not seen among the samples (Fardpour, 2011, 99) Table 1 (Figures 2-19). depicts the examples of candlesticks associated with different Islamic periods such as Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid. Due to the great similarity between the candlesticks of the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods, the corresponding examples are presented in the same column. As shown by Table 1, the candlesticks belonging to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid, and Safavid periods have similar structural forms and all have bulky and heavy bases. Also, regarding the cross section of the candlesticks, it can be observed that some artworks belonging to these periods have a circular shape and some others are polygonal. However, these features are not visible in the examples associated with the Safavid period. The general structure and form of the candlesticks in this period were changed into a cylindrical shape. In general, until the Timurid period, fabricating candlesticks in the form of a heavy and bulky base with circular or polygonal cross sections was common, and in the Safavid period, metalworking



Figure1.

Cylindrical container, early sixth millennium BC, National Museum of Iran.

Source: Fardpour, 2011, 98.

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artists followed novel principles in designing and making candlesticks and produced tall cylindrical candlesticks. In order to clarify the extent to which these handmade candlesticks can be seen in the sample images of the Shahnameh's paintings, first, the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb is introduced and then the candlestick images in the paintings of this version are examined as well.

Table 1. Introduction of the metal candlesticks' bases in Islamic samples by Seljuk, Ilkhanid, Timurid and Safavid historical periods. source: [Author](#).

Seljuk	Ilkhanid and Timurid	Safavid
 <p>Figure 2. Cupreous candlestick, Khorasan, sixth century AH, Louvre Museum. Source: Fardpour, 2011, 103.</p>	 <p>Figure 4. Bronze candlestick, discovered from Bozingerd, first half of the 7th century AH. AH, National Museum of Iran. Source: Rezazadeh, 2017:181.</p>  <p>Figure 5. Bronze candlestick. Source: Sabet Sarvestani and Shokrpour, 2014, 8.</p>  <p>Figure 6. Brass candlestick, first half of the 14th century, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017, 87.</p> 	 <p>Figure 14. Brass candlestick, Safavid period, Christie's Gallery, London. Source: Fardpour, 2011, 100.</p>  <p>Figure 15. Candlestick belonging to the Safavid period. Source: nl.pinterest.com.</p>  <p>Figure 16. Brass inlaid candlestick, Safavid period, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar. Source: Fardpour, 2011, 100.</p>  <p>Figure 17. Bronze candlestick, Safavid period, Metropolitan Museum,</p>
 <p>Figure 3. Silver candlestick, 1200-1300 AD, Seljuk period, Iran. Source: nl.pinterest.com.</p>	 <p>Figure 9. Brass candlestick, the early 13th and late 14th centuries, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017, 87.</p>  <p>Figure 10. Brass candlestick, the 13th and 14th centuries, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017, 87.</p>  <p>Figure 11. Brass candlestick. Source: Sabet Sarvestani and Shokrpour, 2014, 14.</p>	






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Seljuk	Ilkhanid and Timurid		Safavid
	<p>Figure 7. Brass candlestick, second half of the 14th century, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017:88)</p>  <p>Figure 8. Brass candlestick, second half of the 14th century, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017, 88.</p>	 <p>Figure 12. Brass candlestick, Herat, the late 15th century. Source: Sabet Sarvestani and Shokrpour, 2014:17)</p>  <p>Figure 13. Brass candlestick, the 15th century. Source: Sabet Sarvestani and Shokrpour, 2014, 19.</p>	<p>New York. Source: Fardpour, 2011, 105.</p>  <p>Figure 18. Brass candlestick, Safavid period. Source: Norouzitab and Afroogh, 2010, 118.</p>  <p>Figure 19. Brass candlestick, Safavid period, the 16th century. Source: nl.pinterest.com.</p>

Candlestick in the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb

Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb is one of the magnificent Iranian painting works belonging to the artists of Tabriz Safavid school and result of the artistic efforts of a group of the best Writing, painting, gilding and bookbinding of the Safavid court's library" in the fields of "Painters, Illuminators, bookbinders and book designer". The writing of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb began about 927 AH upon the order of Shah Ismail Safavid to give to his son Shah Tahmasb as a gift. It was completed during the reign of Shah Tahmasb within the timeframe of 930-984 AH ([Ahmadinia, 2014, 41](#)). A study of the paintings of the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb (printed version of the Academy of Arts with 174 paintings) indicates that the images of metal candlesticks are drawn in four ones which are described as following:

1. **Figure 20** shows a night scene in which one of the women of the house or interior is seen with a candlestick in her hand and a lighted candle on it on a floor of the residence. This painting shows that the candlestick form was a drawing of the most widely used and common accessories of that time. Also, the candlestick form of this painting has a wide and bulky body and an arch can be seen in the



Figure20. A word in Zakhak's dream source: [Rajabi et al, 2013, 51.](#)

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middle part of the base. Moreover, the cross section of the candlestick appears to be circular.

2. Figure 21 shows a group of passenger tent dwellers who set up their tents in the dark of night and lit a candle to create light at night which is observed on a metal candlestick. This painting also shows that the use of such candlestick bases has been common at the time of writing and illustrating of the Shahnameh's drawings. The general shape of the candlestick has been made of a wide and bulky base with a narrower neck and a circular cross section, and general geometric patterns can be seen on its body.

3. Figure 22 also shows a scene from a bedroom in which a candlestick base and a lighted candle are used in order to provide the night light. The presence of the candlestick image in this scene also refers to the existence of such objects in the residential spaces of that period. The candlestick in Figure 4 has a wide body and an arch and curvature can be seen in its middle part. Also, a hemispherical bulge decorated with curved lines can be seen in the upper part of the body, which differs from the images of the previous two candlestick images. The cross section of this sample also resembles a circle.

4. In Figure 23, one can observe a metal candlestick with a lighted candle in the middle of the painting and among a group of people who are depicted in a free space at night. This image, like the previous ones, points out to the importance of using candlesticks in the daily life of that time. Regarding the formal structure of the candlestick in Figure 5, it can be said that this object, like the previous three examples, has a wide and bulky body with a narrow neck and a circular cross section whose middle part is smooth and without curvature, as in the case displayed in Figure 21.

Examination of these four paintings clarifies that candlesticks are one of the most widely used and common accessories in the lives of the people of that time and almost the general forms of all examples displayed in the paintings were similar to each other, all having a bulky and wide body. The first and third examples had a curvature in the middle, while the second and fourth ones did not have such a curvy and complex shape. In addition, the first and third cases have been depicted in the residential and interior spaces of the house or palace, while the second and fourth examples are displayed in an open space. Due to this point, the more complex examples of candlesticks in terms of the form were being used more in places, palaces and houses, while simpler ones were being employed in movement conditions, tenting and temporary stays in nature as well as the campaigns. In general, drawing the images of candlesticks in different scenes and places such as the interior of the house or palace, bedroom and open spaces at night all point out to the importance of this practical device in that period.



Figure21.
A word on the arrival of Rostam to the Iranians.
Source: Rajabi et al., 2013, 269.



Figure22.
A word in the story of Ardeshir Babakan with Golnar.
Secore: Rajabi et al, 2013, 351.














Figure23.
A word in the story of Ardeshir Babakan with Golnar.
Secore: Rajabi et al, 2013, 351.

Comparison of the candlestick images in the Islamic paintings and examples

Examination of the candlestick images in the Shahnameh’s paintings, provides general information about the formal structure type of the applied candlesticks of that period, such as the wide and bulky body of these objects. Table 2 presents a collection of pictorial information about the formal structure of the widely used Islamic metal candlesticks belonging to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods. Matching these examples in Table 3 with the candlestick images in the Shahnameh’s paintings, one can perceive the extent to which the illustrator artist adheres to the real space of his time.

Table 2. Matching metal candlesticks’ base images in the paintings of Shanameh of Shah Tahmasb and Islamic examples. source: Author.

Details of the candlestick images in the paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb	Images of the sample candlesticks belonging to different Islamic periods similar to the paintings		
	Seljuk	Ilkhanid and Timurid	
 <p>Details of Figure 20</p>  <p>Details of Figure 21</p>  <p>Details of Figure 22</p>	 <p>Figure 2. Cupreous candlestick, Khorasan, sixth century AH, Louvre Museum. Source: Fardpour, 2011, 103.</p>  <p>Figure 3. Silver candlestick, 1200-1300 AD, Seljuk period, Iran. Source: nl.pinterest.com.</p>	 <p>Figure 4. Bronze candlestick, discovered from Bozingerd, first half of the 7th century AH. AH, National Museum of Iran. Source: Rezazadeh, 2017, 181.</p>  <p>Figure 5. Bronze candlestick. Source: Sabet Sarvestani and Shokrpour, 2014, 8.</p>  <p>Figure 6. Brass candlestick, first half of the 14th century, Metropolitan Museum.</p>	 <p>Figure 9. Brass candlestick, the early 13th and late 14th centuries, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017, 87.</p>  <p>Figure 10. Brass candlestick, the 13th and 14th centuries, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017, 87.</p>  <p>Figure 11. Brass candlestick. Source: Sabet Sarvestani and Shokrpour, 2014, 14.</p>





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Details of the candlestick images in the paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb	Images of the sample candlesticks belonging to different Islamic periods similar to the paintings	
	Seljuk	Ilkhanid and Timurid
 <p>Details of Figure 23</p>	 <p>Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017 ,87.</p> <p>Figure 7. Brass candlestick, second half of the 14th century, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017 ,88.</p>  <p>Figure 8. Brass candlestick, second half of the 14th century, Metropolitan Museum. Source: Mansouri Jazabadi, 2017, 88.</p>	 <p>Figure 12. Brass candlestick, Herat, the late 15th century. Source: Sabet Sarvestani and Shokrpour, 2014 ,17.</p>  <p>Figure 13. Brass candlestick, the 15th century. Source: Sabet Sarvestani and Shokrpour, 2014, 19.</p>

According to the comparisons made in [Table 2](#), the candlestick images of the paintings are not similar to the hand-made samples of the Safavid period and this violates the hypothesis presented at the beginning of the study. The Safavid candlesticks were generally being fabricated in a long cylindrical form, while the illustrations show examples of objects with wide and bulky bodies. Since the version of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb belongs to the Safavid period, it can be stated that the illustrator artists have not depicted the common candlesticks of this period in their paintings. More closely comparing the candlestick images, one can observe many similarities between the forms of the drawings and the hand-made examples corresponding to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods. Most candlesticks belonging to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods have a bulky and wide body as well as a polygonal or circular cross section. It seems that the candlestick images in the Shahnameh have a circular cross section. [Table 2](#) presents examples of bulky candlesticks with a circular cross section belonging to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods, and [Figures 2, 5 and 7-13](#) are examples with circular forms. In addition, the paintings in [Figures 20 and 22](#) depict the

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candlesticks with curvature in the middle part and this feature can be also observed in the samples of Figures 3, 5, 7 and 11-13. The curvature-free formal examples also include Figures 2 and 8-10 which are similar to the candlestick images in Figures 21 and 23. In general, the artists of Shahnameh's paintings have depicted images of candlesticks from earlier periods. Perhaps the aim of the illustrators of Shahnameh was to express a transcendent image of the living space of their time, and the artist imagination of the excellent candlesticks is to express the ideal and glorious image of the same candlestick examples associated with the earlier periods. For a more accurate understanding, Table 3 gives more complete statistical information about the conducted comparison.

Table 3. Matching metal candlesticks' base images in the paintings of Shanameh of Shah Tahmasb and Islamic examples in the form of statistical data. source: Author.

Candlestick image in the paintings of Shanameh of Shah Tahmasb	General features of the candlestick forms belonging to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods			General features of the Safavid candlestick form	
	Wide and bulky base (circular cross section)	Curvature in the middle part	Smooth middle part	Cylindrical and columnar	High
Candlestick image of Figure 2	*	*	-	-	-
Candlestick image of Figure 3	*	-	*	-	-
Candlestick image of Figure 4	*	*	-	-	-
Candlestick image of Figure 5	*	-	*	-	-
Percentage of the dominant features in the images	100%	50%	50%	0%	0%

Referring to Table 3, the similarity between the candlestick images of the paintings and the examples belonging to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods may be better understood.

Conclusion

The present results indicated that the images of metal candlesticks in four paintings of Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb (in the printed version of the Academy of Arts which has 174 paintings) are illustrated in different scenes such as night environment of open space and nature, indoors or inside the house or palace and also the bedroom. All candlesticks in the paintings have a formal structure with wide, bulky and heavy bodies as well as circular cross section, and the examples depicted inside the palace and residential environment have more formal complexities than the ones illustrated in the open space. These formal complexities include the arcs and curvatures in the body of these candlesticks. It is worth mentioning that the general features of these candlesticks are more

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similar to the handmade examples belonging to the Seljuk, Ilkhanid and Timurid periods, and the formal structure of these objects is not structurally similar to the typical cylindrical examples of the Safavid period.

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