

## Morphology of Iranian glass chandeliers of the third to sixth centuries AH

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### Abstract

**Problem Definition:** Glassblowing glassmaking is one of the valuable arts in Iran which dates back to thousands of years ago. This art has entered a new stage during the Islamic era with a rich historical and artistic background, so that the time frame of third-sixth centuries AH is considered as one of the most important glassmaking ages of the Islamic era in Iran. The present study aims to investigate the morphology of glass chandeliers belonging to the Islamic period of Iran. It has been attempted to answer the questions that what are the morphological features of Iranian glass chandeliers and what were the fixed and variable elements of these artworks during the third to sixth centuries AH?

**Objective:** The purpose of this article is to identify the general structure of Iranian glass chandeliers, their components as well as fixed and variable constituent elements.

**Research Method:** This research has been conducted on a descriptive-analytical basis and the information were collected through the library resources.

**Results:** Glass chandeliers are composed of fixed elements of body, neck, base and pendant ring. The body shape of the mentioned chandeliers is elliptical-spherical in the form of an elongated vase, and their necks are long and short with cylindrical and horn-shaped forms. The variety of Iranian glass chandeliers is due to the way the pendant is applied and its location in the opening or middle of their bodies, as well as the decorations of these artworks and the addition of glass paste in the opening of these objects.

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**Keywords:** Morphology, Iranian glassmaking, Glass chandelier, Form and decorations.

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### Introduction

Glassmaking has been considered as one of the ancient, worthwhile and growing industries throughout the history of Iranian art, which has evolved after the rule of Islam, relying on its rich history, so that prestigious artifacts have survived from the early centuries of Islam to the Mongol invasion and the resulting recession of this art as a consequence. Glass works such as chandeliers made from this historical period emphasize the importance of their fabrication. The present research with morphological approach attempts to identify some of the glass works belonging to the Islamic era and provides an overview of the shape of Iranian glass chandeliers. The structural analysis of the artworks morphologically is one of the common approaches in the art studies. The structure of any artwork is a system of the relationships, understanding which requires the investigation of the components of that system. Hence, the present study examines the twelve glass chandeliers left from the mentioned centuries by raising this question that what are the visual features of Iranian glass chandeliers of the third to sixth centuries AH? Since a comprehensive and independent research has not been conducted on the subject of the present study, the morphological study and investigation of Iranian glass chandeliers is necessary.

### Research Method

The current research is developmental in terms of the purpose, retrospective in terms of the time and descriptive-analytical in terms of the nature and method. The data and information have been collected through library resources. A total of twelve glass chandeliers have been left from the third to the sixth centuries AH. The statistical population of this research contains the twelve glass chandelier samples left from the third to the sixth centuries AH, all of which have been examined with a morphological approach.

### Research Background

The morphological analysis of the works in the field of literature is not a new topic and several articles have been published in this regard, including those employed the morphology, views and theories of Vladimir Propp as an approach in the sample analysis. The morphology of Jami's story of Layla and Majnun based on Propp's theory written by Zohrehvand and Masoudi (2014), morphological analysis of Siavash story based on Propp's theory by Estaji and Rameshki (2013), Structure of Sheikh Ishraq's narratives based on Propp's model written by Atash sevda and Sadeghi (2012) and several relevant articles in this field, have discussed the morphology and Vladimir Propp's theory. Also, Maatoufi (2014) in his book entitled "Clay and glass from the historical city of Gorgan" has investigated the superficial characteristics of Gorgan glass, including the carafes, vases and other glass containers in a tabular form. Goldstein (2008) in a book entitled "Glass works", Volume 10 of the collection of Islamic arts compiled by Khalili, examined and

explored the glass artworks of different regions after defining this art, and analyzed them in terms of the construction technique, motifs and colors. Pope (2011) has briefly investigated the glass blowing industry associated with the first centuries of Islam in Iran, Egypt and Syria until the Mongol invasion and then during the Safavid, Zand and Qajar dynasties. Ali Akbari Kord Mihani (1994) represented the origins of the glass blowing industry, a brief history of post-Islamic glass blowing and its fabrication techniques, and also introduce several glass works mentioning the place and century of their origin. In an article entitled "A comparative study of glass-working motifs of Seljuks in Iran and Fatimids in Egypt during 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries (A.D)", Khanpour and Anzabi (2015) examined a total of 34 samples of various artworks belonging to Iran and Egypt from the perspective of their motifs. However, they did not examined any glass chandelier sample. Kamandloo (2012) examined the Iranian carpets with chandelier motif and mentioned a sample of glass chandeliers made in Egypt. In the field of art studies, no comprehensive study has been found which explores the Iranian glass chandeliers from a morphological point of view. In this regard, the present paper deals with the identification and morphological study of these artworks in the mentioned periods.

### Morphology

Morphology is a field of science in the area of literary studies which is currently used in other fields, including art studies. The term morphology was first proposed by Vladimir Propp, a Russian researcher and anthropologist. He has quoted this term from the biology and believes that morphology is the study and identification of the plant components, their relationship with each other and with the whole plant (Propp, 1989, 7). In his opinion, the study of the form of works is as important as the morphology of the form of beings. He considers the investigation of the physical forms of beings (both living and non-living) to be a morphological task. Literally, morphology means the examination and recognition of the shapes (Propp, 2007, 17) as well as the study of forms. That is, the study of the building blocks of an object and their relationship with each other and with the whole structure of that object (Asa Bergar, 2000, 32). Therefore, it can be said that morphology is closely related to the structure and shape. Hence, to understand and study a work, its components and elements must be examined (Goldman, 2003, 109). In other words, conducting research on the structures of the artworks, recognizing their forms and types and any kind of division that can distinguish works based on characteristics, fall in a category of the morphology (Sarami, 1989, 4). As mentioned earlier, morphology as one of the methods of artistic explanation, is an effective approach in recognizing and determining the fixed and variable elements of an artwork. The fixed elements are those that are permanently present in the work, while variable ones appear in different forms and cause a variety of works (Parsa & Salavati, 2010, 56). Considering that the basis of art criticism with any approach is focused on the form of the artwork, so with

the help of this approach, one can achieve a general picture of the morphology of the works and examine and analyze them as well.

### Iranian glassmaking art

Glassmaking is one of the glorious and prestigious arts of Iran over the history of Islam. Iranian glassmaking was developed and flourished during the Islamic era while preserving and continuing the fabrication and embellishment techniques of glass works belonging to the previous era. About three centuries after the conquest of Iran by Muslims, the art of glassmaking, which had stagnated for nearly a century and a half, was noticed and underwent changes in terms of the shape, form and decoration. This is due to the fact that during the third and fourth centuries AH, Iran was revived scientifically, culturally and artistically and benefited from the material and spiritual comfort under the reign of the Samanids, one of the largest independent dynasties of Iran after Islam. Throughout the history of Iran, the artists have left prestigious artworks whenever provided with comfort and tranquility. Paying attention to the art and literature has been one of the important services of the Samanid kings so that it can be stated that their period is considered as a movement for the national art of Iran (Allam, 2007, 78). This attention to the artists and artisans led to the rapid evolution of glass blowing which had existed from the previous era (Nasri Ashrafi, 2009, 426). The artifacts obtained from the excavations of Neyshabur and Samarkand have indicated two large centers of glass making in the Samanid era (Attarzadeh & Hoshyar, 2017, 204). In the past, it was thought that the glass objects belonging to the Islamic era were made only in Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia. However, several glass artifacts belonging to the Islamic era have been recently discovered in Iran (Fukai, 1992, 97). In recent years, a large number of glassware corresponding to the third and fourth centuries AH have been obtained from the archaeological excavations of Neyshabur, Rey, Turang Tappeh in Gorgan, Tappeh Mil in Varamin, Hormozgan, Saveh, Decius in Kerman, Harireh city in Kish Island, etc. Also, Bandar Siraf, one of the important commercial centers of the Persian Gulf, was excavated during these years, and several artworks including the glass blowing furnaces and glass pieces related to this period were found, which point out to the existence of glassmaking workroom in this port (Pope, 2011, 141-147).

The Saffarids (261-379 AH/875-989 AD), Ziyarid dynasty (316-433 AH/918-1041 AD) and Buyid dynasty (334-447 AH/932-1055 AD) are from other governments of the mentioned centuries, whose rulers, like the Samanids, paid attention to science and art (Munes, 2006, 36). During the next centuries, until the Mongol invasion, beautiful glass objects were made in Iranian glass blowing workrooms. The Ghaznavids (351-528 AH/962-1186 AD), Ghurids (543-612 AH/1148-1215 AD), independent dynasty of Seljuks (429-590 AH/1134-1193 AD) and Khwarazmian dynasty (490-628 AH/1030-1096 AD) ruled over Iran during the

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mentioned centuries (Bayat, 2009, 169, 183). The role of the Seljuks in the Iranian art history is organized in such a way that their ruling period is considered as a brilliant and creative era for the Iranian art. The arrival of the Seljuks in Iran in the fifth century AH, on the one hand, led to the increasing development of Iranian art in the following centuries, and on the other hand, led to the development of various arts, including the glass blowing. Of course, the support and encouragement of Seljuk kings was effective in the excellence of this art. In the fifth and sixth centuries AH, the beauty, diversity and technique of the glass industry reached its peak, so that the surviving artworks are signs of the development of this industry in the Seljuk period (Maatoufi, 2014, 172). The political conflicts in the late Seljuk period led to the rule of Khwarazmian dynasty over Iran. However, during the short time period of their rule, no change and diversity is expected in the arts, including the glass blowing. From this period onwards, the glassmaking industry declined, because the Mongol invasion caused so much destruction so that most of the artworks were destroyed and the industries were forgotten. However, this field of art was revived during the Safavid period (Gluck & Pantone, 2006, 103).

### Glass Chandeliers

In most rituals and civilizations, light has been regarded by human beings and light and its symbols have been praised in Iran since pre-Zoroastrian times. In Islam and the Holy Quran, faith (verse 257 of Surah Al-Baqarah), divine guidance (verse 122 of Surah An'am), the Prophet (verse 46 of Surah Al-Ahzab), the essence of the oneness of God (verse 35 of Surah An-Noor) and ... are examples for the light. The chandelier as a means of lighting, is one of the objects associated with light and in addition to the application aspect, it has been used for decoration in religious places such as mosques. Ernst Kühnel studied the fabrication of chandelier and its application in Islamic art and stated that chandelier is one of the important furniture of the mosques, the luxurious type of which was placed next to the altar. These chandeliers were slightly changed in the form of narrow or gathered pots of their cheeks with a protruding body, wide opening and glass rings to pass chains and hang from the ceiling (Kühnel, 2005, 137).

Also, a standing or added tube has been placed inside the chandelier body for placing the candles and other items such as tallow or animal fat, oilseeds such as flax and sesame. The examined glass chandeliers are made in the same shape with different details and most of them are colorless except one which is made in blue. The size of Iranian glass chandeliers varies from 7 to 18 cm. The height and diameter of the largest chandelier are 18.1 and 17 cm, respectively (See Figure 1) while the smallest sample is 7.7 cm high and 6.8 cm wide (See Figure 2). The images of glass chandeliers of the third to sixth centuries AH belonging to Iran are presented in Table 1 along with the linear drawing of each work in the order of the century.



Figure 1.  
The largest glass chandelier.  
Source: Goldstein, 2008, 59.

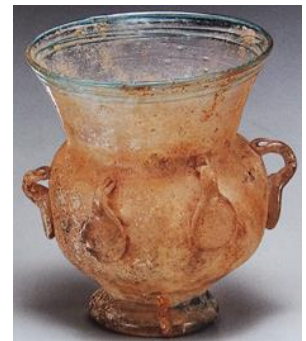


Figure 2.  
The smallest chandelier of glass.  
Source: Carboni, 2001, 166



Figure 3.  
Chandelier with oval-spherical  
body. Source: Authors

## Morphological Study of Iranian Glass Chandeliers

Studying and investigating the glass chandeliers left from Iran during the third to sixth centuries AH, it can be stated that the body, neck, base and pendant ring are the main constituent elements of these artworks. Though the components and constituent elements of the Iranian glass chandeliers are common, the difference in their size has caused different shapes. This difference is more evident in the body and neck. Although a vase form has been considered for the glass chandeliers, the values of their body diameter and height have led to the diversity of this form so that the body of glass chandeliers are observed in two different shapes of oval-spherical and elongated vase (See Figures 3&4). In some tall and narrow chandeliers, the height of the body is higher than its diameter, and in some others, the diameter is greater than the height, in which case the final form is short, wide and spherical. The neck shape of the glass chandeliers is short or long which can be seen in the form of cylinders and horns. In addition, the body of Iranian glass chandeliers is without any motif and decorated with glass paste of the same color as the body or blue and green ones. These added adornments are sometimes present on the edge of the neck and opening in the form of a horizontal line and sometimes on the body, at the junction of the rings. Glass rings installed at regular intervals on the body to pass the chain and hang from the ceiling were observed at the beginning of the body (where the body is attached to the neck) in 8 Iranian chandelier samples, while connecting the opening to the body in 4 ones. The pendant rings of Iranian glass chandeliers are attached to the body in two ways. In the first case, a narrow strip is embedded from the end of these ring-like forms to the base with glass paste, which is formed with the specific tool (See Figure 5). It is worth noting that in chandeliers with elongated and narrower form, the glass rings are stretched from the opening to the body, and at the same junction point, vertical extension strips are extended to the chandelier base for the decoration and stiffening purposes (See Figure 6). In the second case, the glass ring is placed above the circular surface, which is added to the main body of the chandelier by means of the glass paste (See Figure 7).



**Figure 4.**

Chandelier with elongated vase body.

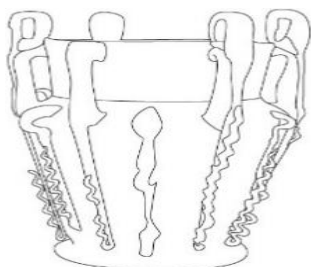
Source: Authors



**Figure 5.**

Rings on the body

Source: Authors.



**Figure 6.**

Rings connected from the opening to the body.

Source: Authors.



**Figure 7.**

Rings attached to the circular surface.

Source: Authors

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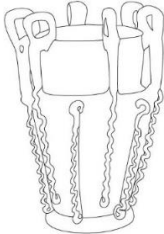



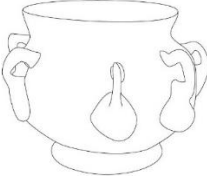





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**Table 1** Iranian glass chandeliers belonging to the third to sixth centuries AH. Collected : [Authors](#).

Linear drawing	Picture 2	Centuries 3-4	Linear drawing	Picture 1	Century 3
					
Source: <a href="#">Tait, 1991, 1239</a>		Source: <a href="#">Carboni, 2001, 166</a>			
Linear drawing	Picture 4	Century 4	Linear drawing	Picture 3	century 4
					
Source: <a href="#">Aliakbarzadeh kordmahini, 1994: 104</a>		Source: <a href="#">Aliakbarzadeh kordmahini, 1994: 103</a>			
Linear drawing	Picture 6	Century 4-5	Linear drawing	Picture 5	century 4
					
Source: <a href="#">Carboni &amp; Whitehouse, 2001, 2</a>		Source: <a href="#">Aliakbarzadeh kordmahini, 1994: 101</a>			

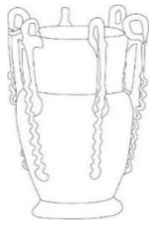

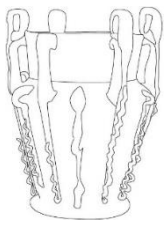









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Linear drawing	Picture 8	Centuries 4-5	Linear drawing	Picture 7	Centuries 4-5
					
Source: <a href="#">Goldstein, 2008: 60</a>			Source: <a href="#">Aliakbarzadeh kordmahini, 1994: 115</a>		
Linear drawing	Picture 10	Century 5	Linear drawing	Picture 9	Centuries 4-5
					
Source: <a href="#">Carboni, 2001, 166</a>			Source: <a href="#">Kroger, 1995, 182</a>		
Linear drawing	Picture 12	Centuries 4-6	Linear drawing	Picture 11	Centuries 4-6
					
Source: <a href="#">Goldstein, 2008: 61</a>			Source: <a href="#">Goldstein, 2008: 59</a>		

Also, a flat and wide base has been considered by the glass artist at the bottom of these glass chandeliers during construction for placing the candle. The surface of Iranian glass chandeliers' body is free of motifs. [Table 2](#) examines the fixed and variable elements of glass chandeliers depicted in [Table 1](#) in order to provide a comprehensive overview of the shape of the mentioned artworks.



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**Table 2.** Morphology of Iranian glass chandeliers belonging to the third to sixth centuries AH.

Collected : [Authors](#)

Image number	Body form		Neck				Flat based	Pendant ring		Connection point of the rings	
	Oval	Vase	Short	Tall	Circular	Horn		Attached ring	Attached ring	Chandelier opening	Chandelier center
1		*		*	*		*	*		*	
2	*			*		*	*		*		*
3	*		*			*	*		*		*
4	*		*			*	*		*		*
5		*		*	*		*	*		*	
6	*			*		*	*		*		*
7		*		*	*		*	*		*	
8		*		*	*		*	*		*	
9	*			*		*	*		*		*
10	*			*		*	*		*		*
11	*			*		*	*	*			*
12	*			*		*	*	*			*

## Conclusion

Reviewing Iranian glass chandeliers left from 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries AH, it was concluded that the body, neck, pendant ring and base are fixed components of these artworks. However, the shape and size of each of the mentioned components, type and location of the pendant rings as well as the adornments of the glass chandeliers have caused the diversity of these works as the variable elements. The body of Iranian glass chandeliers is oval and vase-shaped, and differences are observable in these forms according to the size of the body diameter and height. The glass chandeliers neck is long or short and is made in the form of cylinders and horns. It should be mentioned that the neck of the vase-shaped chandeliers is long and cylindrical. Moreover, a flat base has been designed by the glassmaker at the bottom of the glass chandeliers. The glass pendant rings have been added to the glass chandeliers in two ways. In the first case, from the end of this ring-like form, a glass strip is added to the chandelier base with glass paste, while in the second case, several circular forms are added around the chandelier body by means of the molten glass and glass rings are placed at the beginning of each of these surfaces. Also, the location of the pendant rings was found to be different on the glass chandeliers and they have been installed in the opening in vase-shaped chandeliers with long and cylindrical necks and in the middle of the body in other samples. The addition of glass paste to the body, opening and end of pendant rings is one of the decorations of Iranian glass chandeliers. These ornaments were added while the chandelier body was still warm and finished and shaped with specific tools. Knowing the rich and long history of the art of glassmaking in Iran, conducting morphological study on other glass artworks such as garments, carafes, ewers, etc.

can be the subject of future researches which has not been emphasized in the current paper.

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