

**Original Research Article****Investigating the Form and Application of Carafes Known as Ashkdan in the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum**Abbas Karimi<sup>1</sup>, Arezoo Khanpour<sup>2\*</sup>**1. Lecturer, Faculty of Craft Arts ,Tabriz Islamic Art University, Tabriz, Iran.****2. Assistant Professor, Faculty of Craft Arts ,Tabriz Islamic Art University, Tabriz , Iran.**

Received: 09/07/2020 ;

accepted: 06/02/2021 ;

available online: 22/12/2022

**Abstract**

**Problem statement:** Traditional Iranian glassmaking in the Safavid period was revived after several decades of stagnation with the help of Venetian glassmakers who was invited to Iran by Shah Abbas. Glass Ashkdans are a collection of carafes and those that were made during the Qajar period are found in most museums around the world as the hallmarks of Iranian glass art. The Metropolitan Museum has a valuable collection of this type of carafe (Ashkdan) belonging to the Qajar period, whose form and application are investigated in the present study.

**Research objective:** The present study aims to investigate the form and application of Ashkdans in the Metropolitan Museum to answer the two questions: 1. what was the use of Ashkdan? and 2. how and when did Ashkdan become prominent in Iranian glass art? It also expresses the hypothesis that Ashkdan was first introduced by Venetian glassmakers into Iranian Glass art during the Safavid period, and its application varied over time, according to the cultural and social conditions of each period.

**Research method:** This applied qualitative descriptive-analytical study was conducted by using bibliographic databases and gathering the data from the field studies and through in-depth observations of the authors. The research sample is a collection of carafes referred to as Ashkdan belonging to the Qajar period. Ten samples of Ashkdans in the Metropolitan Museum were selected through a non-probability sampling method.

**Conclusion:** Based on the results, the application of Ashkdan is not related to its title and is based on its form. Making swan neck bottles became prominent by adaptation from western samples and using them as containers for wine, rosewater, and flower. Ashkdan, one of the most prominent works of Iranian glass art in the world, has received much attention since the Qajar period. The hypothesis on the influence of Venetian glassmakers on Iranian glass art in this study was approved. The form of the necks and mouths of the Ashkdans was influenced by the teachings of Venetian glassmakers, inspired by the Roman Kuttrolfs, and became common according to existing descriptions from the Safavid period. The samples in most museums around the world, especially in the Metropolitan Museum, belong to the Qajar period.

**Keywords:** *Carafe, Ashkdan, Swan-neck bottles, Qajar Ashkdan, Qajar glass art.*

\*Corresponding author: a.khanpour@tabriziau.ac.ir, +989124384366

## Introduction and statement of the problem

It is impossible to conduct historical studies on glass history without reviewing the prominent works of Iranian glass art. Islamic period glassmaking has been very important due to developments and innovations, and has gone through many ups and downs so that it was forgotten after the Seljuk period (with the Mongol invasion); however, the industry was revived with the beginning of the Safavid dynasty and contribution of Venetian artists. In examining the Islamic works of glass, in some cases, we see many ambiguities in the methods and even applications.

As the symbolic, contemporary, and famous forms of Qajar, a collection of carafes referred to as *Ashkdan*<sup>1</sup> (tear container) in the Metropolitan Museum has been investigated in the present study. The Ashkdans in this museum are considered as one of the most diverse and distinctive ones in terms of quality, form, and color.

so far, no comprehensive study has been conducted on the carafes referred to as Ashkdans, the authors have analyzed the form and application of these works. The features of Ashkdan's form have made it to be recognized as a valuable symbol of Iranian glass art in a short time, to the extent that it has become part of the sources of inspiration for the works of contemporary artists, such as Dale Chihuly and Louis Comfort Tiffany. In this research, the authors examine the origins of the form and application of Ashkdans by answering these questions: what was the application of this type of carafe, and from what period was it known as Ashkdan? First, by examining a collection of artifacts referred to as Ashkdans in the Metropolitan Museum, the sources of their form were investigated, and then their applications were determined through the analysis of their production method and comparison of their similarities with other types of carafes.

In studying visual sources and documents of glass art, researchers have always faced problems such as possible identification of glassworks and the lack of sufficient documentation. Unauthorized excavations and private ownership of Iranian glassworks have also hindered investigations in this field.

The dating of the recent Iranian glassworks is not an

easy task; first, because common forms and specimens have remained intact for a long time. In the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.H., Iranian rose-water sprinklers with their elongated, streaked, swan-like, and curved necks attracted the interest of Europeans. To respond to the desire of Europeans, Iranian glass workshops continued the tradition that had begun in the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.H. Undoubtedly, this made the work of accurate dating of Iranian glass products (from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.H.) very difficult (Pope & Ackerman, 2008, 3015). Accordingly, making Ashkdan has become prevalent since 10<sup>th</sup> century A.H. . Today, the evidence for this claim is not available in museums, and in most cases, the Ashkdans belong to the late Safavid and early Qajar periods.

On the introduction of the Ashkdans in the Metropolitan Museum, the authors witnessed the identification of the works having the word “probable”, which is exactly what is given in the present study.

## Research background

The authors did not find any research directly related to the title of the present study. So far, no comprehensive research has been conducted on Ashkdans in Iran, and our little information is related to limited references in Latin sources. Samples of related works are also often kept in museums and collections of Islamic art.

Lack of sufficient and documented sources on the history of glass art and the uncertainty of the identification of works in museums have always been among the main problems of researchers, which is evident in the present study. In the process of collecting and studying the available sources, the authors were faced with limitations in printed Persian and Latin sources, and in most cases, there were only brief references.

Goldstein (2008), in his book “Glass from Sasanian antecedents to European imitation,” has described the function and the origin of the form of these works in detail, which are investigated in the present study.

Carboni et al. state that Ashkdans are one of the most common carafes in the Safavid period (Carboni, Lynn, Goldstein, Knudsen & Page, 2006)

In his book, “5000 Years of Glass” Hugh Tait (1991) introduces the examples of works known as Ashkdan, gives a brief explanation about the use of these works. Shinji Fukai (1992) in his book “Persian Glass” has provided a brief explanation of glass art in the Safavid period by simply providing examples of these works. Also in other sources such as “Art of Glass” (Page, Carboni & Alcorn, 2006), “Glass” (Ruth Hurst, 1975), these works are often referred to as rose-water sprinklers, and no explanation has been provided on the function and form of these works.

The very same problem evident in all these sources is the lack of sufficient information on the application of these works. In studying the function of Ashkdans, speculations were often made, and finally, the mythical and symbolic aspects of the forms were taken into consideration.

## Research method

This qualitative descriptive-analytical study was conducted by using bibliographic databases and conducting field studies. They are based on the logical and visual analysis of the authors. The tools used in bibliographic research included notes while the data from the field were gathered through virtual observation and registration of works. Also, for a detailed investigation, additional to the authors’ analysis, a sample of Ashkdan was made in one of the traditional glass factories in Tehran to match and observe its similarities with the carafe, in terms of production method.

In this study, 10 samples of carafes referred to as Ashkdans were selected from the collection of glass artwork in the Metropolitan Museum through a non-probability sampling method. The samples were analysed in terms of their different technical and functional aspects, and their forms and contents were compared. Due to the lack of direct access to the works in the Metropolitan Museum, the images used in the study were often obtained from library and Internet sources (website of the museum).

## Glassmaking in the Safavid period

The art of glassmaking is one of the traditional arts

that has gone through many ups and downs in different periods of history under the influence of the governing powers. This could be easily proved by studying the history of the Mongol and Safavid dynasties. “Following the invasion of Iran by the Mongol and their long conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.H. (13<sup>th</sup> century A.D.), pottery [ industry ] grew up on the plateau of Iran, but glassmaking declined significantly” (Fukai, 1992, 99). However, after several centuries, the dilettantism of Safavid kings and their respect for artists had a great impact on the development of various arts. The kings of the Safavid period sought to revive Iranian art by employing artists from countries like China and Europe. Shah Abbas (1587 - 1629 A.D.) provided the conditions for glassmaking so that this profession would reach its peak again. “His interest in the development of industry and the encouragement of craftsmen led to the revival of glassmaking in Iran, and this time, the city of Shiraz became the center of glass production. The glassmakers of this period, in addition to using various well-known decorative methods such as molding, cutting, and taping, sought the help of painting and created magnificent works” (Akbarzadeh Kurd Mahini, 1995, 32). In their travelogues, many tourists have referred to the art of glassmaking and its revival by Safavid kings. Jean Chardin, a French traveller, while describing his travels in Iran from 1077 to 1081, refers to the fact that the Iranians had not achieved remarkable success in the glass industry: “There are glass factories all over Iran, but their products are often cracked and dirty, full of bubbles. This is because their kilns last only three or four days, and a type of plant referred to as Dermaneh (Artemisia) that burnt in their kilns does not produce as much heat as those used in European factories. Shiraz glass is the most delicate artifact in the country and the Isfahan has the ugliest product in Iran. Because the artifacts of Isfahan are just broken glass pieces that have been melted again. Iranian glass industry is hardly eighty years of age. A poor and low-ranking Italian man sold this technique to the Iranians in Shiraz for fifty Ecus” (Chardin, 1985, 350).

Wolf also praised Shiraz glass in comparison with the glass produced in Isfahan, emphasizing that “Isfahani

glassmaker merely re-melts broken glass, while Shiraz glassmaker makes completely new glass. Although Shah Abbas tried to revive glassmaking by Venetian artists, glassmakers in the following centuries produced only the usual amount of glass needed for their region” (Wolf, 2010, 153).

In addition to Chardin and Wolf, Ferrier writes in his book “The Art of Persia” about the production of Shiraz glass: “There is a consensus among a group of scholars that Shiraz glass is often clear and colorless, and many of the glasses and bottles made in Shiraz, that have survived since then, have the same characteristics, including several long-neck bottles and goose-neck rosewater sprinklers with molded bodies and mounted on a pedestal consisting of a wide circle and a short stem with two domes. Rose-water sprinklers with this shape have been used among other dishes for banquets” (Ferrier, 1996, 305).

In each of these sources, in addition to the satisfying quality of glass produced in Shiraz, there are references to the presence of Venetian glassmakers in Iran. Other researchers and writers have highlighted the presence of Venetian glassmakers; For example, Stefano Carboni and a group of authors in “The Art of Glass” agree that: “The glass industry throughout the Islamic world has shrunk and stagnated under poor economic conditions and lack of demands, while in Europe (mainly in Venice), this art and craft flourished in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Available sources and information on the production of glass in Istanbul in the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and the import of Venetian glass in the same period prove the claim. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Iran which was ruled by the Safavids, the glass industry had been brought back to life in the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan by greedy Venetian glassmakers who had been banished from Murano Island. They taught this industry to traditional glassmakers with lower value and artistic quality” (Carboni et al., 2006, 71). “Glassware from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. undoubtedly belongs to the industry of Iran itself and is influenced by artistic styles of some glassmakers from Venice. These works have beautiful colors that are unique to Iran” (Ferrier, 1996, 232). “During the reign of Shah Abbas I, Iran’s relations

with European countries developed. During his time, Europeans entered the Iranian court and this made Iranians familiar with foreign industries. Glassmaking, which was almost a forgotten industry, was taught by an Italian in Shiraz for money, and thus the art was revived” (Fukai, 1992, 101).

This period in the history of European glass coincides with the period when the glassmakers of Murano left Venice. They were seeking another place in other countries to live and for their only occupation, which was glassmaking. The support of the Safavid court for the arrival of these artists causes the expansion of glassmaking in Iranian cities, especially Shiraz. Shiraz was the cradle of Iranian glassmaking in this period and most of the glassworks, including the carafes, referred to as Ashkdan were produced in this city. According to Chardin, the industry flourished in the Safavid era, especially in Isfahan, Shiraz, and Kashan; and in terms of quality, the best glassware was produced in Shiraz.

Another major factor in the influence of Venetians on the glassmaking methods in Iran is the development of Venetian glass imports. “Since the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, Venetian glassware, beads, mirrors, windows, and glasses have been sent to Iran. Up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the form and methods of Iranian glassmaking are influenced by European glass” (ibid.). The commonness of the imported Venetian glass expanded the grounds for being influenced by their form and their methods of production and decoration. “About the common glasses from the Ottoman period before the eighteen century, one can mention the receipts of a Venetian merchant in Constantinople in which 2500 glasses were ordered from Venice in the second trimester of the fifteenth century” (Jenkins, 1986, 49).

### **Carafe known as Ashkdan**

Ashkdan is a kind of carafe that was made for the first time in the Safavid period and was recognized as a characteristic of Iranian glass art all over the world in the Qajar period. “This type of utensils is one of the special samples of glass produced in the Safavid period, mostly produced in Shiraz. Perhaps one of the reasons for the production of Ashkdans in the Safavid period



was the relationship between Iran and Western countries because there are not any instances of producing this kind of container before then” (Goldstein, 2008, 183).

Numerous components were involved in manufacturing this type of artifact in the Safavid period, among which the presence of the Venetian artists in Iran and teaching glassmaking techniques to Iranian artists is undeniable. Master glassmaker’s skill and the quality of molten glass materials mentioned in various sources are among the factors that have a direct impact on the quality of Ashkdan. In the following, ten specimens of Ashkdan kept in the Metropolitan Museum are examined, which are presented in Table 1.

In a brief explanation in his book “Masterpieces of Islamic Art”, an official of the Metropolitan Museum states: “The dating of swan-neck carafes is challenging. Glassmaking in Iran has a long history dating back to pre-Islamic times. During the Safavid period and the reign of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629 AD), foreign tourists mentioned the revival of glassmaking methods in Shiraz and Isfahan by the Venetians. During this period, high-quality glass was imported from Venice, which has met the existing demand, had an impact on local low-quality glass products. The paintings and frescoes in the Safavid period are full of delicate glass with narrow necks, often full of wine or drink; however, it is difficult to tell if the glass was imported or locally produced. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, swan neck bottles were produced in Shiraz to store wine, perfume, and rose water. Historical documents and works of Iranian glass produced in later periods has helped the museum to attribute these swan neck bottles to 19<sup>th</sup> century Shiraz” (Ekhtiar, 2011, 280).

According to this document, the chronological information of this collection based on the identification cards in the Metropolitan Museum is not very accurate, and researchers consider these works to belong to the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In studying and classifying these works, their form features such as color, dimensions, and quality can be mentioned. Ashkdans are often turquoise, azure, amber, and colorless. By technical examination of these works, it could be claimed that the quality of the melted glass was not ineffective in the final shaping of the work.

## Form, technique, and content in the carafes referred to as Ashkdan

In this section, the form, technical and semantic origins of carafes referred to as Ashkdan are described. In the available sources and documents, this type of carafe has been introduced as a swan neck bottle. The most common color of Shiraz Ashkdans in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was azure.

Ashkdans have three distinct parts: the main body, the twisted neck, and the tear-shaped mouth (Table 2). The main body usually has a base that holds the whole structure. The base is also evident in Venetian works.

The mouth in all the samples was drawn by glass pliers and found a tear shape, which will be mentioned in the following.

The twisted neck of the Ashkdan - known in many sources as the swan neck bottle - is one of the most distinctive features of this form compared to its predecessors and contemporaries. In one sample of the studied Ashkdans, strips of glass - glass decorations in hot conditions - have been used for decoration Table 1 (specimen 7). The type and shape of the curvature in the neck, in addition to beautifying and distinguishing the final product, has a direct relationship with the artist’s skill and the primary ingredients.











The decorations in the Ashkdan 2 are completed using a maze waveform, which has not been previously common in Iranian glassworks. The decoration in specimens 7, 8, and 10 are made using molds when molding the main body.

In seven samples of examined works, the static of the work was supported by the foot and there are no vase bases in the other three works. In basing technique, like the common forms in the Safavid and Qajar periods, the indentation of the bottom of the dish has been used to emphasize the static (Table 2).

## Form and technical similarities

Glassmaking was revived “during the reign of King Abbas the Great by Italian glassmakers who came to Iran through teaching this industry, so it is not surprising that the glass of this period is similar to the glass of the post-Renaissance and Baroque period” (Ruth Hurst,

Table 1. Examining ten Ashkdans kept in the Metropolitan Museum. Source: Authors using www.metmuseum.org.

Figure	Specifications	Figure	Specifications
	1. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), 18th or 19th century, Iran Height 38.4 cm, diameter 11.2 cm Donated by Edward C. Moore Collection, 1891 Registration Number: 91.1.1559		2. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), 19th century, Shiraz Height 38.1 cm, diameter 11 cm Donated by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 Registration Number: 17.190.829
	3. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), 18th or 19th century, Iran. Height 32.4 cm, diameter 11 cm. Donated by Edward C. Moore Collection, 1891 Registration Number: 91.1.1558		4. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), 18th or 19th century, Iran. Height 35.9 cm, diameter 11.5 cm. Donated by Anne Pine Blumenthal, 1956 Registration Number: 56.149
	5. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), 19th century, probably Iran. Height 38.7 cm, diameter 11.6 cm. Artistic Donation by J. Markand, 1883 Registration Number: 83.7.255		6. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), 19th century, Iran, probably Shiraz. Height 34.9 cm, diameter 11.6 cm. Donated by Edward C. Moore Collection, 1891 Registration Number: 91.1.1577
	7. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), body blown in mold, 18th or 19th century, Iran Height 30.8 cm, diameter 11.4 cm Donated by Edward C. Moore Collection, 1891 Registration Number: 91.1.1549		8. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), 18th or 19th century, Iran Height 23.5 cm, diameter 7.7 cm Donated by Edward C. Moore Collection, 1891 Registration Number: 91.1.1594
	9. Swan neck bottle (Ashkdan), probably 18th or 19th century, Iran. Height 39.8 cm, diameter 11.6 Donated by J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 Registration Number: 17.190.828		10. Swan neck bottle, 18th or 19th century, probably Iran Height 41.8 cm, diameter 12.2 cm Donated by Edward C. Moore Collection, 1891 Registration Number: 91.1.1576

1975, 47). Therefore, the sources of inspiration for this form should be sought in European works, especially in Italy and the city of Venice.

Sidney M. Goldstein writes in his book “ Glass from Sasanian antecedents to European imitation “ about the form of Ashkdan: “Researchers place Ashkdans in the

group of swan-neck glass. The neck is in the shape of S or Z and their mouths are formed vertically. Some samples of this group have a flat, long, and knobbed base. Others are based on a circular and recessed base. The form of these vessels is probably an adaptation of the German vessels known as Kuttrolf (taken from

Table 2. Classification of Ashkdans based on their form features. Source: Authors.

	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Mouth										
Neck										
Base										

the ancient Latin Guiturnium). These vessels are often not necessarily made for drinking as they have a neck composed of two or three intertwined tubes, and the Venetian containers, known as *inghistere* or *Anghistere* (as the German *Angster* taken from ancient Latin, meaning narrow), also combined this form with a mouth form of eye washer, which usually had a singular neck, and is similar to the Venetian *Anghstera* from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, now residing in the British museum located in London” (Goldstein, 2008, 183). Kuttrolfs or *Anghsteras* are beverage containers that were made in Germany and Italy in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Examining the German *kuttrolf* specimens in Table 3, we find that the curvature of the neck, the mouth, and the overall form of this type of *carafe* bear many similarities to *kuttrolf* dishes or *Anghsteras* Table 1 (specimens 11, 12 & 13). These works are referred to as Venetian style works due to the influence of Venetian glass. “Glass made in imitation of Venetian products in places other than Venice is referred to as Venetian style<sup>2</sup> glass. Venetian glass was popular in many parts of Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries” (FAÇON DE VENISE, n.d.) The long necks and their tear-shaped mouths are similar to the form of Venetian *Kuttrolfs* (Table 4). By studying the *kuttrolf* or *Anghstera*, prevalent in Germany and Italy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, one can see the influence of these works’ forms on the *Ashkdan*, which could be attributed to the presence of Venetian artists. This influence was more evident in the curvature of the neck and the shape of the mouth. There is an indentation in the base of the *kuttrolf* to improve the stability and facilitate the manufacturing process. This similarity is also seen in the base of *Ashkdan* (Table 4).

The figures presented in Fig. 1 indicate the form resemblance of *carafes* to *Ashkdans* both made in the city of Shiraz in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The form similarities of the two containers are evident in the pictures. After studying the similarities of *Ashkdan*’s form with other Iranian glassworks contemporary to its period, it was found that the *Ashkdan* was initially made with a flat neck and round mouth.

### Technical features in decorating *Ashkdan*

Most of the decorations on *Ashkdans* are heat decorations and techniques such as painting and carving are not used in the. Heat decoration is done by using additional strips and waveform on the glass. “Some bottles related to the Safavid period of this type are molded and decorated, or in some cases, their bodies are blown in the form of waves and have wavy grooves. In many cases, they are also unadorned” (Alkhemir, 2014, 135). The simplicity and lack of decorations are other things that confirm the influence of Venetian glassmaking. Except in Fig. 7, 8, and 10, in the main body of which molded motifs have been used in the decoration, there are only simple waves on the body of the other *Ashkdans*.

All specimens, except in specimen 7 and 8, have bases, and in specimen 10, the stem base is used, which is part of the broken base. In all the specimens, indentations are made in the base of the container. This feature has also been common in the *carafes* contemporary with the *Ashkdans*

Based on technical studies and re-making an example of *Ashkdan*, it can be claimed that the *Ashkdans* and common *carafes* in the Safavid period are very similar in terms of production methods.

Table 3. Form examination of kuttrolf or Anghstera dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries. Source: Authors.

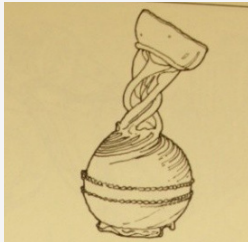



Figure	Specifications	Figure	Specifications
	11. Kuttrolf design, 16th century, Germany, height 17 cm, Venetian style (Ruth Hurst, 1975,29)		12. Kuttrolf, decorated with additional milky-colored stripes, 17th century, Germany, Venetian style (Charleston, 1990,101)
	13. Kuttrolf, 15th and 16th Century, Venice Registration Number: Cl. VI n. 00550. Source: www.musecivici.modena.it		14. Kuttrolf, Anghstera, 16th Century, Venice (Mariacher, 1959.56)

Table 4. Form similarities between kuttrolf and Ashkdan. Source: Authors.








Similarity	Ashkdan	Venetian sample
Similarity in the rotation of the neck with the Venetian-style Ashkdan and kuttrolf		
Similarity in the indentation of the base with the Venetian kuttrolf and Ashkdan	 	
Similarity in the form of the Ashkdan's mouth with the Venetian Anghstera		
Similarity in the use of the maze wave form in Ashkdan the Venetian anghstera		



Fig. 2 shows the stages of making carafes and Ashkdans in traditional glass factories, which are completely similar in all stages, except the final stage, where the neck of the container is reheated and formed with a tool, and finally, the mouth takes the form of a tear.

### Study of application

There are many love stories about the use of this popular and special form of Iranian glass. The shape of Ashkdan is similar to a carafe, usually blue with a long, narrow, and curved neck, and a wide mouth that looks like a teardrop that moves upward.

Arthur Pope considers the use of these works as a carafe for wine and a single-flower vase. “In Shiraz, wine carafes with long spiral necks have sometimes been made as vases for single flowers, with simple patterns such as

straight or zigzag. In 1660, tourists reported the import of various types of glass from Venice and France to Iran. They denounce the Venetian glassmaker who taught the Iranians how to make glass for a small amount of money” (Pope & Ackerman, 3015).

“These dishes were definitely made in central and southern Iran in the late 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century. Certainly, the form of these vessels is derived from traditional Venetian glassmaking, which was taught to traditional Iranian glassmakers by Venetian glassmakers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or this form has developed in a traditional production process gradually over time. Today, this form is very popular among Iranian families” (Carboni et al., 2006, 71).

Ashkdan is known as one of the most prominent examples of Iranian glass art. According to many researchers,

#### Similarities of carafes and Ashkda of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Iran

Similarity in form and especially in shaping of the main body

Similarity in dimensions and sizes of carafe and Ashkdan

Similarity in the use of clear and spiritual colors

Similarity in the type of basing and recession

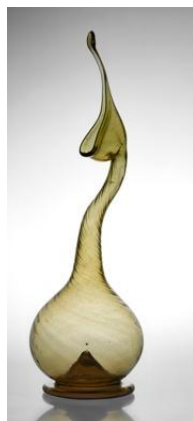


Ashkdan, 19th century AD, Shiraz



Carafe, 19th century AD, Shiraz

Similarity in location of production



Carafe, 19th century AD, Shiraz



Carafe, 19th century AD, Shiraz

Fig. 1. Form similarity between carafe and Ashkdan. Source: www.metmuseum.org.

the reason for the fame and importance of Ashkdan is the romances behind the use of this type of carafe. This reputation is such that Dale Chihuly, a contemporary glass artist, was inspired by the Ashkdan form to make some of his works (ibid, 71).

To prove that this form was not meant to be used as a rose-water sprinkler, Stefano Carboni writes “Due to the lack of handles and tubes, it can hardly be referred to as a sprinkler. In Iranian myths, it is known as Ashkdan - a container for tears - in which saline liquids are poured into and stored. The story is that when the husbands - the Qajar kings - went on a long journey for business or pilgrimage for a long time, the wives would cry in husbands’ absence so that they could prove their love” (Carboni et al., 2006, 71). Accordingly, since the Qajar period, this group of carafes has found a romantic and mythical function, that was certainly the reason for their naming.

Sidney Goldstein writes about Ashkdan’s nomination in his book “Glassworks”: “This nomenclature may be due to the special bowl shape, which in any case does not cover the eye and hardly accepts such conditions, so this nomination is imaginary” (Goldstein, 2008, 1883).

Sadegh Hedayat mentions the use of these vessels in the Qajar and Pahlavi periods in his book “Pearl Ball”: “... The ardent Muslims had Ashkdans and collected the tears they gave for lamenting the death of Ali’s sons in them, and put them in their graves after their death” (Hedayat, 1980, 112). According to researchers, the use of these containers is to store teardrops thus calling them Ashkdan. This usage is completely far from reality because scientifically, teardrops evaporate in less than a minute under any circumstances. According to the current documents and similar specimens in Western countries, these containers are considered as a kind of carafe for storing or drinking beverages. Two Ashkdans filled with colorless fluids can be seen in a drawing from the same period (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3 shows an Ashkdan-like carafe with a flower-like Ottoman tulip inside. These carafes have been used to store single-bough ivy (Carboni et al., 2006, 71). This painting belongs to the 16<sup>th</sup> century AD and coincides with the Safavid period in Iran.

According to these documents, it is not possible to define an exact function for the Ashkdan. In some sources, Ashkdan can be referred to as carafe and vase.



Fig.2. Different stages of making carafes and Ashkdans in Alvan Bolour glass factory. Source: Authors.

This is while in other sources, it has a symbolic function of a container for tears.

### Conclusion

By examining ten specimens of Ashkdans in the Metropolitan Museum, we studied the form and application of these type of carafe.

From the Safavid period, as the import of glass works from Venice to Iran increased and the Iranian glass art was revived by Shah Abbas, making carafe referred to as Ashkdan became prevalent in the cities of Isfahan and Shiraz. In travelogues and historical researches, Ashkdans have been mentioned numerously since the Safavid period, this is while the specimens in museums in Iran and around the world often belong to the late Safavid period and Qajar period. During the Qajar period, the best Ashkdans in terms of glass quality and form were produced in Shiraz. Most of the specimens studied in this paper belong to Shiraz during the Qajar period and are kept in the Metropolitan Museum.

Studying the Italian glassworks in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, we come across a collection of works referred to as kuttrolf, which has obvious form similarities with the Persian Ashkdan. The concurrence of the found specimens and their form similarities confirm the technical and form exchange in the art of glassmaking between Iran and Italy during the Safavid period. By studying historical reports, it can be claimed that the form of Persian Ashkdan was influenced by the

glass imported from Venice, the presence of Venetian glassmakers, and the adaptation of German Kuttrolfs and Venetian Anghsteras, and after being combined with Iranian glassmaking capabilities and indicators, such as the production method, color, and decoration, it has attained an Iranian identity. The shape of the base, the main body, its color, and size have obvious similarities with the carafe. Generally, it can be concluded that Ashkdans are a kind of carafe that became common since the Safavid period, and parts of its form changed by the influence of Venetian glassmakers' teachings. After the Qajar period, they became one of the most prominent forms of Iranian glassworks kept in major museums around the world. The production of Ashkdans is still common in traditional Iranian glass factories.

Ashkdans have had different functions in different periods: in the Safavid period, as a carafe for storing beverages or vases, in the Qajar period, as a means to show true love, and in later periods, due to the influence of superstitions, as a container to store teardrops to show loyalty to religion. Interestingly, there are no traces of the word Ashkdan in any of the encyclopedias, historical sources, and literary works up to the Qajar period.

By analysing the form of Ashkdan, we can say that Ashkdan is influenced by the Venetian glass art, and now is known as the representative of the Safavid glassmaking art with a decorative role, that has obtained the symbolic title of Ashkdan (tear container) merely based on historical narrations and myths. The visual features of this form connecting with the Iranian audience led to its recognition over time as a representative of Iranian glass art in most museums around the world.

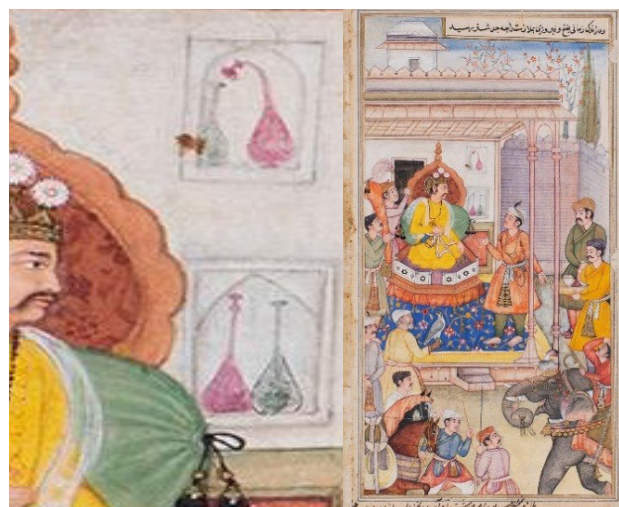


Fig. 3. An Ashkdan used as a vase from Razm-Nameh (1598-99) Source: Carboni et al., 2006, 27.

### Endnote

1. Tears are a means used by people in the past to show their love to their loved ones.
2. façon de Venise: Glass made in imitation of Venetian products in centers other than Venice itself. Italian glass art in Venice in the 16th and 17th centuries was popular in many parts of Europe. (Venetian style)

### Reference list

- Ali Akbarzadeh Kurd Mahini, H. (1995). *Glass; Merchant*

*Border Collection*. Tehran: National Museum of Iran.

- Alkhemir, S. (2014). *Light in art and science from the Islamic world*. USA: Ediciones El Viso America.
- Carboni, S., Lynn, M. D., Goldstein, S., Knudsen, S. & Page, J. (2006). *The art of glass*. London: Toledo museum of art.
- Chardin, J. (1958). *Chardin Travelogue* (M. Abbasi, Trans.). Tehran: Amirkabir Press Institute.
- Charleston, R. J., Fisher, J. E., & Michael, J. (1990). *Masterpieces of glass: a world history from the Corning Museum of Glass*. NY: HN Abrams.
- Ekhtiar, M. (2011). *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- FAÇON DE VENISE (n.d.). Retrived from <https://www.cmog.org/glass-dictionary/fa-de-venise>.
- Fukaii, Sh. (1992). *Persian glass* (A. Shishegar, Trans.). Tehran:

Miras-e Farhangi.

- Goldstein, S. (2008). *Glass from Sasanian antecedents to European imitation*. Tehran: Karang.
- Hedayat, S. (1980). *ToopMorvari*. Paris: Geneva.
- Jenkins, M. (1986). Islamic Glass: A Brief History. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 44(2).
- Mariacher, G. (1959). *Le verre*. Geneve: Pierre Tisné.
- Page J. A. (2006). *The Art of Glass: Toledo Museum of Art*. Toledo, Ohio and London.
- Pope, A. U. & Ackerman, Ph. (2009). *A tour of Iranian art from prehistoric times to the present* (N. Daryabandari, Trans.). Tehran: Elmi Farhangi.
- Ruth Hurst, V. (1975). *Glass*. London: connoisseur.
- Tait, H. (1991). *Five thousand years of Glass*. London: British Museum.
- Wolf, H. (2010). *Ancient Iranian handicrafts* (S. Ebrahimzadeh, Trans.). Tehran: Elmi Farhangi.

#### COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Bagh-e Nazar Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



#### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Karimi, A. & Khanpour, A. (2022). Investigating the Form and Application of Carafes Known as Ashkdan in the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 18(103), 5-16.

DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2021.247039.4656

URL: [http://www.bagh-sj.com/article\\_140737.html?lang=en](http://www.bagh-sj.com/article_140737.html?lang=en)

