A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SITUATION OF FELTING IN FELTING CENTERS OF FARŞ (SHIRAZ, ESTAHBAN, KAZEROON)

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ABSTRACT
Throughout the history and geography of Iranian felting, Fars Province has always been one of the most important centers of felting and felt products. Particularly in Shiraz, Estahban and Kazeroon, felting has been worthily and remarkably important; however, felting has declined slightly in the province. Felting is now just a name in textbooks. There is no exact information on production, color, pattern, motifs, tools and materials used for felting. However, few people are still involved in this industry. Data is collected by field studies, vising few active felting workshops in Shiraz, Estahban and Kazeroon and interviewing feltmakers to analyze and compare current situation of felting in these cities. This study introduces feltmakers of Fars Province, survivors of this art, their method, works and special features, colors, patterns and motifs of their works. This study identifies the reasons for which felting is abandoned as expensiveness of raw materials, substitution with low-quality mats, difficult felting process and low income.

Keywords: Estahban, Shiraz, handicrafts, Kazeroon, Kolahmali, felting

Introduction
Felting is an art which dates back to thousands of years ago, depicting a beautiful nature with its simple motifs and natural patterns. Felt is the same as nature without adding anything to wool; felt is made only by fulling the wool due to its flexibility.

Felting is a very old industry. Little is known about its origin; however, it is well known that Neolithic people who dealt with wool were familiar with felt (Aghakhani, n.d.).

Undoubtedly, felt is one of the most ancient fabrics; felting is not younger than pottery. Felt mat, armor, and shield are noted in documents related to 2300 BC. In Bronze Age graves discovered in Germany, felts have been found which that date back to 1400 BC (Wulff, 1994).

Searching for felt, we are dragged to central plains of the Central Asia, where Central Asian nomads breeding sheep and using its wool could wove the simplest type of simple, single-colored wool mat (Mousavi, 2002). Many felt objects such as curtain, carpet, skullcap, horse coating and blanket were found in the Scythians graves of the fifth century BC which were discovered in areas covered with snow and ice in the central Russia.
Turkic tribes migrated from these areas and Iranian nomads have been the absolute masters of felting. They make Kapanak (wearing felt) with seamless hood and sleeves; they are master in decoration and arrangement of the felt with patterns in which colored wool is used around the felt (Wulff, 1994). This traditional mat is made and used in areas of Iran in which nomads breed sheep. One of these areas is Shiraz Province which has been one of the active centers of felting not far past. Currently, few people make felts in some cities of this province. Unfortunately, this valuable art is fading.

**Felting in Fars Province**
Felting has been seasonal and occasionally permanent. Feltmakers worked seasonally from 5 to 9 months. Felting started mid-April; however, this practically depended on the time of wool snipping and tribal migration. Felting was done in Shiraz, Marvdasht, Sarvestan seasonally and in Kazeroon and Estahban permanently, because customers were both rural and urban whose demands were not seasonal. In yaylags, major felting workshops were often in houses; in qishlaqs, the number of feltmakers was not notable.

**Felting in Shiraz**
In Shiraz Province, rural and nomadic men used caps. Hence, production of felt caps has been common in different parts of this province. In production of nomadic felt cap, division of labor can be observed between craftsmen of Sarvestan and Shiraz; in Sarvestan, wool was converted to felt sheets which were framed and processed in Shiraz. Currently, felt caps are made in Shiraz using Kolahmali device; in addition to cap, numerous felt products are made in Shiraz.

**Felting in Estahban**
Estahban is one of the most important centers of felting in the Fars province. Because of its quality and beautiful patterns, Estahban felt is popular not only in the Fars province but also in many other parts of Iran. Felting has been done in Estahban for more than one hundred years. In the past, there were 12 felting workshops of which 10 workshops were located in the Sabouri Caravansary, the Eastern Street, and 2 workshops were located in the Khalil Almasi Caravansary. However, these caravansarys has been destroyed recently to construct new buildings, shutting down many felting workshops.

**Felting in Kazeroon**
Felting in Kazeroon dates back to 1911 when Bakhtiar Nasiriani started felting in this city. Until 1911, felting was not common in Kazeroon and it was limited to Kolahmali. Currently, his grandchildren run the felting workshop; however, this workshop will probably shut down in the future due to recession in feltmaking and substitution of felt mats by machine woven carpets. Founder of the Feltmakers’ Market was Haj Moin (founder of the Moin Market). He converted the current location which was a piece of land at the time to the market. This market is located in the north west of the Shohada Street. This market is currently half-closed; feltmakers do business there more or less.
Active Workshops in Fars Province
Numerous problems such as existence of machine woven products, cheap industrial mats, expensive production and raw materials, lack of support and organization of feltmakers, lack of insurance and lack of support by insurance companies and related organizations have discouraged youth to choose this profession. However, there are people throughout the province who make felts professionally despite the problems noted above only to preserve this local art.
Figure 4: Altafis’ workshop in Estahban; 1: Mohamad Hasan Altafi; 2: Haji Altafi; 3: Mohamad Altafi; 4: Akbar Altafi; 5: Ali Altafi; 6: Mohamad Altafi

Figure 5: Akbar Altafi: feltmaker

Figure 6: Ghasem Bagheri; Kolahmal

Figure 7: Hossein Hajbar; feltmaker

Figure 8: Darais’ workshop in Estahban; 1: Mirza Darai; 2: Mohamadreza Darai; 3: Asghar Darai; 4: Akbar Darai

Figure 9: Bagheris’ workshop in Estahban; 1: Morteza Bagheri; 2: Ghasem Bagheri; 3: Javad Bagheri

Figure 11: Abasali Abrnak; feltmaker

Figure 12: Mohamad Rabani; feltmaker

Figure 13: Ebrahim Keyfargir; Kolahmal

Table 1: people who are currently in felting industry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Feltmaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Estahban</td>
<td>Hossein Hajbar, Hossein Kouhpeyma, Reza Kouhpeyma, Reza Tajbakhsh, Aliagha Jamnejad, Akbar Hatami, Ghasem Hatami, Gholamreza Jalal, Ehsan Saidi, Yousef Saidi, Ahmadali Afzali, Ali Sobhanipour, Altafi’s family, Darai’s family, Bagheri’s family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazeroon</td>
<td>Abas Farhadi, Mohamad Farhadi, Moslem Farhadpour, Mohsen Farhadpour, Nasirian’s family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: previous feltmakers who had quit felting due to death, aging, lack of location or expensiveness of tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Feltmaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shiraz</td>
<td>Mansour Kamali, Babajan Tajoldini, Hossein Souzanzan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estahban</td>
<td>Mohamad Hasan Altafi, Haji Altafi, Mohamad Altafi, Mirza Yal, Hossein Rabani, Gholamreza Razmkhah, Ahmad Taj, Hossein Taji, Reza Nadermanesh, Javad Tajbakhsh, Haji Shahsavani, Darvish Jamnejad, Habib Tajbakhsh, Mohamad Hasan Ghasemi, Mohamad Hasan Nadafi, Ahmad Nemati</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazeroon</td>
<td>Esmail Farhadi, Farhad Farhadi, Rahman Nasiri, Sardar Farhadpour, Bakhtiar Nasiriani, Khodakast Nasiriani, Rahman Nasiriani, Gholam Nasiriani</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: felt products made in felting workshops of Fars province

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Products</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shiraz</td>
<td>Felt mats, hats, sleeping bags, prayer felt, belt, slippers, washcloth, seat covers, ornamental felts and tableau, bags, three-purpose felts (prayer felt, car seat covers and mat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estahban</td>
<td>Felt mats, hats, small round felt, rectangular large felt, cape, felt Cole or Kordak, felt mat, saddlecloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazeroon</td>
<td>Felt mat, horse cover, Kordak, mat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RAW MATERIALS OF FELTING

Material generally used for felting include wool, soap, starch, egg, wax and resin. In Shiraz Province, feltmakers use wool, soap, Ouzo resin or Arjan resin.

Wool
The main material of felt is wool which is provided from sheep. Quality of wool depends on snipping season or age of the sheep. Wool fibers snipped from younger sheep are shorter and more delicate. Moreover, wool is softer and better in spring than autumn.

The wool snipped in spring is delicate, thin and long; thus, these fibers can be well interwoven by fulling and pressure. To snip wool, the sheep is first washed; then, its wool is snipped by snipping scissors. The wool used in felting is naturally white, brown, black, grey or a combination of these colors. Usually, both white and black wools are beaten together several times to hook them together and make a single color. These natural colors are used for background of the felt and the colored wools are used for the patterns. In some areas, this is reverse. The best wool for felting is a wool beaten twice (Hatami & Bahramejad, 2001).

In some felting centers, merino is used instead of wool; however, wool is the only raw material used for felting in Fars province, because merino cannot be felted and appearance of its products is different from
felt. In felting centers of Fars province, the wool snipped from 5-8 month-old lamb is used for felting; the wool snipped from older sheep is not flexible enough.

Soap

In felting workshops existing in Fars province, soap is used for sterilizing wool. A soap bar is grated in a bucket of water and sprayed on the wool. Slippery of soap minimizes friction and fibers are interwoven immediately (Hatami & Bahramejad, 2001).

Resin

Once felting is finished, feltmakers use Ouzo resin (an herbal adhesive) or almond resin for final processing the felt or the cap.

Table 4: raw materials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Raw materials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shiraz</td>
<td>The wool of Fars province is not applicable for felting, but is can be used for carpet weaving; felting workshops existing in Shiraz provide their required wool from Nain, Ghatieh (near Neyriz) and Sirjan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estahban</td>
<td>The required wool is provided from Kerman and Bam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazeroon</td>
<td>The required wool is produced in the workshop or bought from nomads, particularly in spring. The felt is exchanged with wool.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shiraz | Felting device, batting device, comb, fabric frame, scissors, snipper, batting comb
---|---
Estahban | Batting arc, comb, frame, scissors, snipper, batting comb
Kazeroon | Comb, snipper, frame, framing tool, knife, felting device, scissor, water pipe to wrap the felt, batting arc (currently, wool is beaten in factories located in Shahreza)

**Felting Pattern and Motifs**

The most important characteristic of felt is its motifs. Feltmaker has no previous pattern, forming it when making felt. Feltmaker forms the pattern and underlying wool layers. The feltmaker does not see the result of his subjective pattern until initial steps of felting are not finished. The feltmaker intuitively realizes that combination of several colors and few subjective patterns can create an endless variety. Undoubtedly, these patterns and motifs date back to Pre-Islamic period and not merely ornamental. Symmetrical motifs and geometrical shapes represent very strong imagination of people (Nosrati, 2001). The patterns are framed and the motifs are surrounded by colors other than color of the motifs.

![Figure 26: Framing patterns; Kazeroon](image)

![Figure 27: Felting; Kazeroon](image)

![Figure 28: Felting; Kazeroon](image)

In felting centers of Fars province, the felts have delicate motifs (Daneshgar, 1997). Usually, the felt mats have patterns, while cape and Cole have no pattern. Usually women form decorative motifs on felt caps by using colored string yarn.

**Motifs of Felts**

In workshops existing in Shiraz, the motifs include Chaharsou, lotus flower, Kaji, flower, grinder mill, eight-pointed star, Safgh, prayer, human motifs and Hafeziyeh tableaus, Achaemenid soldiers, mythological animals of Persepolis, and nasta’liq poetry. Felt tableaus are decorated by silk printing.

![Table 6: felt motifs used in Shiraz](image)

In workshops existing in Estahban, the motifs used include birds, Lachaki flowers, bergamot, bird and pot, Safgh, Parak, Chaharsou, three bergamots, camel and goat.
In workshops existing in Kazeroon, the motifs used include samovar, eight-pointed star, arch and flower.

Table 8: motifs used in Kazeroon

Table 9: felt motifs used in Fars province

Table 10: colors used in felting and type of dyeing in felting centers of Fars province
Kazeroon | Herbal dyes were used previously; currently, chemical dyes are used. White alum, salt and lemon are used to dye wool. Common colors are black, pink, orange, red, Turquoise, green and blue. Moreover, white, black, green, dark blue and greys are obtained from local sheep.

**Conclusion**

In the past and even up to 50 years ago, felt was used in most parts of Fars province. Because of its properties, felt was very popular. Unfortunately, there are few people in Shiraz, Estahban and Kazeroon who make felt currently. Uncontrolled import of low-quality and cheap goods, expensive raw materials and difficult felting process are the reasons for decline in this industry. Most people think felt is the most invaluable mat used only by poor people, while this is not true. Currently, there are few people who make felt. The Department of Handicrafts of Fars province is required to find solutions for this problem. By comparing current situation, differences and similarities of felting in Shiraz, Estahban and Kazeroon, it can be concluded that:

There are active workshops in three cities. However, there are more workshops in Estahban than Shiraz and Kazeroon, respectively. Felting is mostly a family business in Estahban. Felt mats are made in three cities. Cole or Kordak is made in both Estahban and Kazeroon. However, diversity of felt products is higher in Shiraz that Estahban and Kazeroon. In Shiraz, felt is made in the form of shoes, washcloth, seat cover, sleeping bag and decorative frameworks. Felt is combined with leather to make bags. In Estahban and Kazeroon, felt is commonly used for mats, Cole and horse cover. Wool, soap and Ouzo resin are used in three cities.

Comb, scissors, frame and snipper are used in three cities. Felting and batting devices are used in Shiraz, while Kazeroon provides its wool from batting factories existing in Shahreza. Felting device is used in Kazeroon, while batting arc is used in Estahban for batting wool.

Common motifs used in three cities include lotus flower, prayer, eight-pointed star, bergamot and lachak. Motifs are framed and formed by combining several colors. These motifs are not merely decorative; they are derived from interests and beliefs of Pre-Islamic period. These motifs are formed subjectively and intuitively. Numerous motifs are formed in Shiraz. In addition to traditional motifs, plants and humans are the subject of felting which are formed by colorful wools. Mythological animals of Persepolis and nastaliq poetry are formed by silk printing on the felts.

Herbal dyes were traditionally used. However, chemical dyes are currently used because herbal dyes are expensive. Chemical dyes are used in Shiraz. Chinese inks available in the market are used in Estahban. White alum, salt and lemon are used to dye wool in Kazeroon.

**Acknowledgment**

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