Treatment of Persian Lacquer Bindings

ABSTRACT

Persian lacquer work is a method of decorative painting on a prepared surface and involves the use of shellac. From the 14th century onward a variety of decorative objects were lacquered in the Persian speaking world, most commonly pen boxes, mirror cases, and bookbindings.

The production of a Persian lacquered bookbinding is a laborious process. Layers of ground are applied by brush on the pasteboard substrate, followed by a coating of shellac. After the design is laid out, the painting is blocked out in layers of opaque paint consisting of pigments bound with animal glue. Intricate details are painted on these blocks of color. Upon completion of the painting, the entire surface is coated with shellac. Any gilding or metallic decoration is laid into this tacky shellac. The piece is finished when a smooth homogenous surface is attained after repeated applications of shellac interspersed with sanding.

The nature and construction of these materials creates many challenges for the conservator. Because the underlying structure is often misunderstood, many traditional paintings, objects, and book conservation techniques could be detrimental to the delicate painted surface. This presentation will share preliminary observations and analytical findings concerning the structure and materials used to produce Persian lacquer objects, chiefly bookbindings, and share a number of treatment approaches for the various damages associated with Persian lacquer bookbindings.

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The cleaning of East Asian (urushi) lacquer surfaces is a complex task. When newly manufactured, these coatings are well known to be durable and unaffected by almost any solvents. However, with the onset of ageing, the lacquer polymer more. The cleaning of East Asian (urushi) lacquer surfaces is a complex task. When newly manufactured, these coatings are well known to be durable and unaffected by almost any solvents. However, with the onset of ageing, the lacquer polymer changes its properties as it degrades under the influence of UV and visible light radiation and recurring changes in rela Persian lacquered book binding from 1878 (Source: Jacques Safavi in Pinterest and Fateme Toorani in Pinterest). As a general rule Persian bookbinders worked anonymously. In the Timurid period, however, the names of several binders are documented in Ḑūst-Moāʿālem’s Ḥāl-e honarvarān, a Persian account of calligraphers and book craftsmen of the 9th/15th and 10th/16th centuries (Ḑūst Muhammad’s Account, p. 185). Ḑūst Muhammad’s Account of Past and Present Painters, ed. L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson, and B. Gray, Persian Miniature Painting, Oxford, 1933, repr. New York, 1971, pp. 183-91. R. Ettinghausen, The Covers of the Morgan Manafi Manuscript and Other Early Persian Book Bindings, Studies in Art and Literature for Belle da Costa Greene, ed. The term lacquer is used for a number of hard and potentially shiny finishes applied to materials such as wood or metal. These fall into a number of very different groups. The term lacquer originates from the Sanskrit word lākṣa (लाक्ष) representing the number 100,000, which was used for both the lac insect (because of their enormous number) and the scarlet resinous secretion, rich in shellac, that it produces that was used as wood finish in ancient India and neighbouring areas.