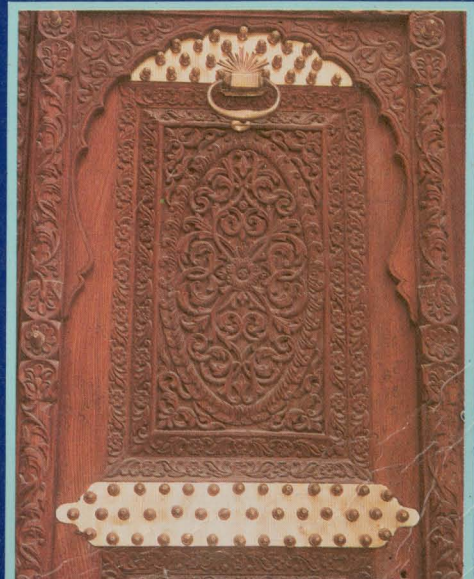




Prospects for Development of Traditional Crafts in OIC Countries

*Proceedings of
The International Seminar on Craft: Prospects for Development
Held in Rabat, Between 23-25 October, 1991*



ORGANISATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

**RESEARCH CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC HISTORY, ART & CULTURE
(IRCICA)**

Prospects for Development of Traditional Crafts in OIC Countries

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Prefaced by

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PREFACE

Ekmeleddin Ihsanođlu

Since its inception in 1979, the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) has been keen on establishing itself, in the particular field of specialization defined in its statutes, as an institution for scholarly research on subjects that had not been previously dealt with.

Our societies are also duty-bound to develop, within the framework of a futuristic outlook, an insight into our present circumstances with a view to examining our problems, identifying the shortcomings over which our performance developmental plans are stymied, and seek to redress the pitfalls that adversely affect our march. Such a process does in fact reflect our cooperation for advancement, reactivating the cycle of economy and promoting the capacity of our youth for innovativeness in all fields - a process that comes in harmony with the requirements of the times ahead, when we will have to catch up with those societies that have broken the wall of recession a long time ago.

The Centre noted through deep thinking and a thorough study the many leads we own in many fields. However, the Islamic world is distinguished from other societies by the sector that is newly developing, with its extensive leads and original roots which could, if efficiently used, contribute in finding solutions to many economic problems that we are suffering from. It is also possible that it would refresh and encourage the cycle of culture and tourism in every state, thereby limiting the unemployment problem that is considered as one of the severe problems facing the developed countries at present.

Traditional crafts with their excellent masterpieces are considered the true wealth of our societies which we inherited from one generation to the other and their roots will continue to extend to the coming generations.

The arts of geometric and floral decorations on the walls and roofs of architectural heritage, wood carving, masterpieces of fabulous mosaics and tiles, the splendid shell portraits, dovetailed glass portraits, the artistic creativity in pottery and earthenware, archetype straw crafts here and there, the variety of the beautiful leather crafts and their derivatives, artistry in textiles, the perfect beauty of carpets are the true signs of fortune that are imitated and marketed by Western fashion companies. These traditional industries are considered an important source of foreign currency paid by tourists for collecting such artistic crafts as are all distinguished articles with unique features.

The Centre has also noticed that Islamic countries on top of their enrichment abounding with traditional crafts, with a variety of shapes, designs, styles and methods of handicraft, are facing some difficulties and obstacles that prevent their development, and even start to disappear in most of the Muslim countries.

However, modern technology and mass production of machinery forced many artisans to seek refuge in factories, leaving their traditional vocational crafts behind. Other reasons for such a result were financial straits, lack of education and trend of customers for more cheaply manufactured goods and some other elements which were overviewed by the participants within their presentations.

The traditional industry is connected with many important sectors which have influences in many Ministries of the Member States. Such influences can be easily noticed through reviewing the following investment formed by side sectors which will lead us to accept the fact that it is a vital artery that provides our countries with permanent elements of grants.

- This sector is distinguished in offering job opportunities to a high percentage of the manpower without making use of a large capital;
- It encourages tourism, especially a major sector of tourists who are interested to see and own Islamic craft products which will increase, as a result of this fact, the income of foreign currency, plus the income in hard currency;
- It provides opportunities for establishing crafts villages which will activate the economic wheel through employment of a large number of women who will work in their homes thus having a share in the economic development process in the country.
- Finding new opportunities to market a new product that distinguishes the Muslim World, in exchange for the electrical and electronic imports, if well employed could cover part of the deficit in the budget;

With this actual vision to the real leads we own, we are trying to evaluate the actual situation of the traditional industries and their future prospects in order to develop their economical, social and educational aspects. Thus, the Centre found out that achieving such a task would need the conduct of an extensive research and study on design, development of skills, quality of production, financing, marketing opportunities, and national policies pertaining to consumers.

In order to ensure that these matters are treated in a thorough and extensive study, it was found out that such issues must be discussed and deliberated by experts to gain a wider assessment of all its angles. The Centre discovered that bringing together policy-makers, planners, implementors, professionals, experts and crafts creators from South-East Asian States, Arab and African countries and representatives of regional and international Organizations who are concerned with this sector, would provide a unique opportunity to present experiences, discuss future opportunities, exchange information with experts from other states on the prospects and obstacles, for the aim of developing a strategy for global cooperation on this subject. Thereafter, it became certain that convening an international seminar on the prospects of developing traditional crafts in OIC countries would be the first step towards the revival of this

important sector. And in this connection topics that were likely to be discussed were defined as follows:-

Keynote address: Living Crafts in Islam: Past, Present and Future; Sub-Subjects: Islamic Design Heritage - Creating new dimensions in the 21st Century; Technical Cooperation in Skill Development and Transfer of Technology; Quality Craft Production: problems and prospects; Economic and Financial aspects of Craft Development; Exploring New Market Opportunities; Government and Patronage Towards a Dynamic Growth and Preservation of Traditional Arts and Crafts. It was also thought that presentation of country papers by craft experts from Member States would enrich the research process of this seminar, by evaluating the present state of crafts in each country, obstacles and prospects for development within a local overview.

As it was believed that the best way for ensuring the implementation of the seminar objectives would necessitate an extensive cooperation among the institutions concerned with the development of this sector, the Centre contacted the Islamic Development Bank through his President H.E. Ahmed Moh'd Ali who welcomed the seminar project proposal and then confirmed the importance of its implementations, offering to cover part of the required budget. IRCICA considered this goodwill as the first step towards the realization of the project. Aware of the importance of the seminar and the measures that needed to be taken, IRCICA tried to find the most suitable venue for the seminar. Thus in the Kingdom of Morocco the Centre found a lively sector and a fertile environment for traditional industries that enjoy the special patronage and interest of His Majesty King Hassan II in this sector. It is a wonderful sector complete with tradition and richness embedded in every corner, displayed in various cities, among them Fez and Marrakech that are considered open museums.

One of the positive elements which made the Centre decide on Morocco as the Seminar venue was the existence of Ribat al-Fath Association with its capable staff of young men full of enthusiasm and energy for work. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to Dr. Mohamed Guedira, former Director General of Islamic Centre for Development of Trade in Casablanca and presently serving as the Ambassador of Morocco in Turkey, for introducing and recommending the Association for our cooperation, whereafter we came to know H.E. Mr. Abdul Kareem Banany, the Acting Chairman of Ribat al-Fath Association, and realized his strong enthusiasm and positive cooperation for the implementation of the seminar project.

One factor distinguishing the Association is the existence of a Committee among others, focusing on the circumstances and problems of this sector, run by Mr. Omar Amine Ben Abdallah. He lived with these industries for many years, knew the circumstances and problems of the sector and played a great role in the progress and development of traditional industries.

By God's will, the Centre organized this seminar in Rabat, Morocco, between 23-25 October 1991, under the High Patronage of His Majesty Hassan II, King of Morocco, in cooperation with the Islamic Development Bank in Jeddah (IDB) and Ribat Al-Fath Association in Rabat. It will easily be noticed that the Seminar has paved the way for wider horizons of specific proposals for future developments in the field of traditional

industries, where each of them necessitates their follow-up and implementation among Member States.

The Seminar deliberated upon a variety of subjects, discussions were held and recommendations were made. 34 papers were presented by the participants from Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen. Papers were also presented by experts from international organizations and commissions from France and Switzerland and representatives from the Crafts Centre in the USA, the Austrian Institute for Design in Vienna, the Association of Artisans for Catalonia in Spain, the World Crafts Council for Africa, in Mauritius, the Faculty of Science and Technology College in Surrey, United Kingdom, the International Commission for the Preservation of Islamic Cultural Heritage and the Arab Organization for Education, Culture and Science.

A quick review of the results will show that the seminar led not only to a fruitful exchange of views and experiences, but also to specific proposals for future development of the traditional crafts. It can be seen that the seminar was unique with its wide range of participants from different countries and bodies, the various topics discussed and the effective recommendations and steps that were taken. No doubt, the way has been paved for developing a set of projects in the area of crafts promotion thus formulating an integrated plan for developing this field.

Going through the major recommendations of the seminar would be sufficient to understand the importance of the treatments proposed. Among them are the call for preparing international directories for Crafts and their main characteristics; stressing the priority that should be given to education and training of well-qualified craftsmen through specialised programmes incorporating general education and vocational training; preparing educational materials such as art books; organizing the first international Festival of Islamic Crafts; initiation of a programme to exchange hosting craftsmen from Islamic Countries; emphasizing the use of modern technology while preserving the tradition; establishment of a craftsmen's union to ensure provision of raw materials; follow-up its excellence and marketing; foundation of crafts development funds for financing craftsmen in an attempt to raise their productivity and improve resources; emphasizing the urgency for undertaking a comprehensive survey of all crafts institutions including their resources for the aim of establishing a Data Bank in this field.

The post-seminar study tour to the craft workshops in the historical cities of Fez, Marrakech and Rabat was an excellent opportunity for the participants to meet craftsmen, discuss the obstacles and problems, future prospects and to see the environment in which the Moroccan craftsmen flourished.

Following the success of the seminar, UNESCO expressed a great interest in its results and recommendations and commended the efforts afforded for their implementation. As a further step, UNESCO designated the expert responsible for the promotion of this sector to consult with the Centre on the ways and means of future cooperation for dealing with the implementation of the recommendations.

As the objective of the Centre is to support the development plans of Member States which comes in accord with the objectives of the 10 year plan-of-action of UNESCO

for crafts development in the world, IRCICA, concentrated its efforts on seeking ways and means of putting the plan into operation and developing the skills of the traditional arts jointly with UNESCO. In the meantime, the Centre is trying to implement several projects in Member States which could be summarized as follows:-

1- Morocco: International Museum for Islamic Crafts and Arts in Rabat:

In accordance with the recommendation of His Majesty Hassan II, King of Morocco, on the necessity of establishing such a museum, IRCICA has already pursuing activities to achieve this task, as this museum will house the masterpieces of traditional industries from all Member States. The Centre organized a series of meetings with UNESCO and Ribat al-Fath Association, where UNESCO agreed to provide technical assistance for a feasibility study for converting the historical Ludaya Building into a temporary museum to house this project. The two parties also agreed to consult each other on the ways and means necessary for the implementation of this project. In fact, the museum will be treated as an archival building where all types of styles of crafts would be registered. In the meantime, it will form a publicity frontage for visitors from abroad who are interested in seeing the crafts of Members States, their characteristics and forms of creativity reflected in each piece.

2. Pakistan: The First International Islamic Artisans-At-Work Festival

IRCICA is initiating, in collaboration with LOK VIRSA Institute of the Ministry of Culture and in cooperation with UNESCO, the necessary preparations for organizing the First International Islamic Artisans-at-Work Festival in Pakistan in October, 1994, as well as organizing the First International Seminar on Creativity in Crafts of OIC Countries, which aims to encourage the continuation of achieving excellence in creativity in crafts and serve the objectives of the 90's which were considered as the decade of developing crafts in the world. The Festival aims to create an inter-regional awareness of the importance of Islamic crafts for the sake of showing their actual image in the world through presentation of masterpieces of Islamic crafts and the different styles and techniques applied in producing these products, which in balance will assist to find many opportunities for marketing and jobs for a great part of the region's manpower. It also aims to establish an international Centre for creativity in Pakistan to educate and train craftsmen of Member States on the different styles and newly created methods in the field of traditional crafts in all the countries of the Muslim World.

3. Bangladesh: A program to exchange and host craftsmen from Member States:

IRCICA is presently working on the initiation of a programme to exchange and host craftsmen from various Member States for training them on different methods in view of the great benefit it will have on the promotion and popularization of various traditional handicrafts. This step will have a major implication in the exchange of expertise, knowledge of new methods and technology that will serve traditional industries in their progress. IRCICA is coordinating this program with the Institute of Skills Development for Underprivileged Women in Dhaka, Bangladesh, who

undertook to host a number of craftsmen. The Centre is trying now to encourage Member States to support and participate in this programme.

4. Egypt: International seminar on prospects for developing crafts used in the architectural tradition of the Islamic world: "Mashrabiya and Stained Glass"

At present, the Centre is establishing necessary contacts with the Ministry of Culture in Egypt to organize the First International Seminar on this subject. The Seminar will focus on Mashrabiya and Stained Glass since both are suffering from neglect and will eventually disappear due to a number of natural and economic causes. It is hoped that this seminar will be effective in reviving and activating these two sectors which are two basic sources of traditional Islamic heritage, as well as important factors for promoting the cultural and economic aspects of Muslim countries.

5. Tunisia: Prospects for developing traditional carpets in OIC countries:

Several contacts were established between IRCICA and the Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Industries in Tunisia for organizing an international seminar on this important topic for the aim of assessing the obstacles that hinder the development of this sector. Carpet-making is an important branch of traditional industries closely related to economy, trade, tourism and education.

Thus, an additional dynamic study will be needed to evaluate the present situation and define future steps for the development of this sector, eventually leading to the establishment of an international centre to provide vocational training to craftsmen from all over the Islamic world. A competition program will be organized to encourage the creativity of young craftsmen for the future of traditional industries in this regard.

6. Damascus: Prospects for developing Arabesque art in Islamic Crafts:

UNESCO and IRCICA mutually agreed to establish contacts with the Ministry of Education in Syrian Arab Republic to organize an international seminar on methods implemented in the art of Arabesque and the difficulties encountered in its development. Experts of Arabesque, scholars and specialized centres and institutions will be invited to assess the present state of this sector and discuss the future steps to be taken as well as to develop a strategy for global cooperation on this subject .

This seminar will be a unique opportunity to bring together traditional artisans, experts, designers and tradesmen to conduct joint research work and experiments, reflect, coordinate and exchange experiences and study new techniques.

On the other hand, the Centre has received a letter from H.E. Dr. Najah Al-Attar, Minister of Culture, Syrian Arab Republic, praising the efforts put into organizing the Rabat seminar successfully. The Minister added that the decisions and recommendations reached at the seminar were of major concern in Syria, where they were reviewed by specialists for the aim of seeking ways and means for

putting them into effect there, thus, spreading its positive results among all Member States so as to preserve their traditional crafts heritage.*

It is expected that the seminar will discuss important issues related to design and methods used, technical cooperation for developing skills, exchange of practiced techniques for improving quality of productions, education and training of skilled artisans, financing, economy, marketing and obstacles encountered, patronage and national policies which play an important role for promoting traditional crafts.

We look forward to see the publication of this book which will provide a unique opportunity to concerned scholars, experts and institutions who missed the chance of participation, thus through this work they will be able to follow and be informed of all papers and presentations given and the recommendations taken.

May I take this opportunity to express my gratitude and thanks to His Majesty King Hassan II, without whose gracious patronage, this seminar could not have achieved such a great success. I also present my thanks to H.E. Mr. Mohamed Abyad, Minister of Traditional Industries, to Mr. Abdul Karim Bennany, Mr. Ibrahim Faraj, Mr. Omar Amin Ben Abdullah and all the working members of Ribat al-Fath Association. My special thanks are due to H.E. Dr. Ahmad Moh'd Ali, President of Islamic Development Bank.

I also wish to thank my colleagues at IRCICA, especially Mr. Nazih Maarouf, who was given the responsibility of coordinating all the issues of this seminar from the stage of its initiation up to the time of having this book prepared, and to Dr. Salih Sadawi for his contribution. I appreciate the work done by IRCICA staff members in the publication of this book. I also wish to extend my thanks to all my colleagues for their efforts in typesetting, graphic designing, printing and other tasks.