

Woodcarving

Patterned wood carvings often cover architectural elements – pillars, beams, cornices, doors, as well as smaller objects, such as tables, trunks, boxes, Koran stands, book-holders, musical instruments.

The few extant samples of the ancient woodcarving impress us with their beauty and perfection of execution. Among those of the ancient Sogdian woodcarvings which testify to the high skills of ancient masters are the fragments from the upper Zarafshan River such as ancient Panjakent and Istaravshan. As a matter of fact, in Tajikistan and across the ancient cities of Sogdiana images of various creatures had been carved on wood till the 10th century, even after the Arabian invasion. It was only in the later period that they were fully replaced by geometric and floral patterns.

Everyone who has been in Tajikistan knows how important the art of decorative carving for local residents is. It decorates the monuments of ar-

chitecture, household objects, musical instruments, utensils, doors, frames, souvenirs and so forth this is one of the most ancient and widespread crafts in Tajikistan. There are woodcarving (utensils, furniture), stone carving and *gajkori* (architectural monuments, houses, interior decoration).

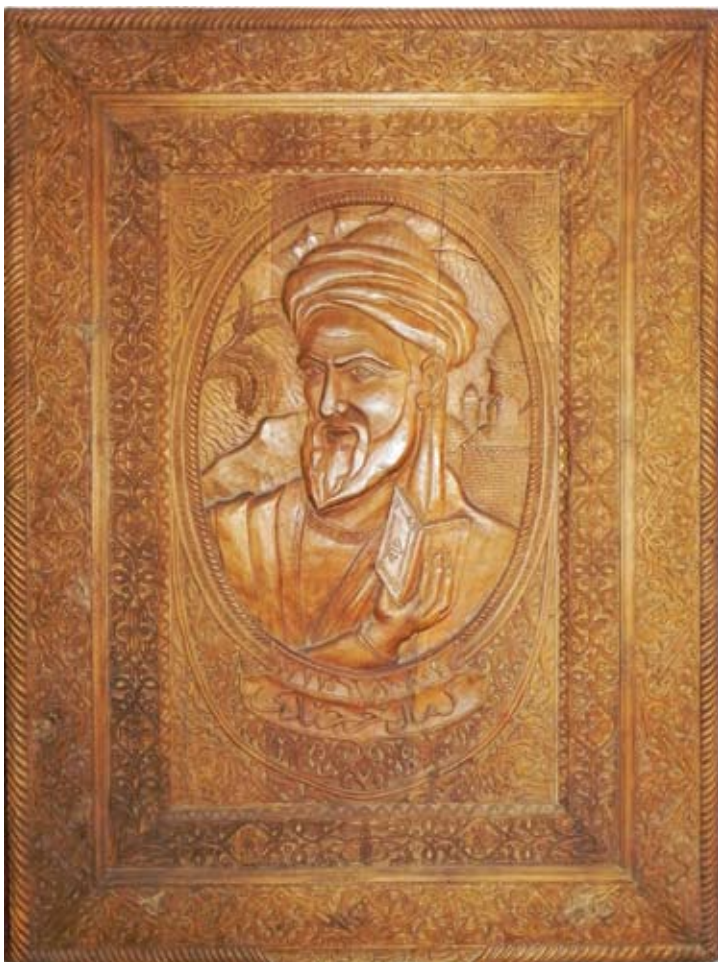
The three main ornamental styles are distinguished in Tajik woodcarving: *baghdadi*, *islimi* and *pargori*. The deep-background *islimi* style has richer artistic qualities than no-background one does. It is used in decoration of both architectural elements and smaller objects, usually in combination with *baghdadi* and *pargori*. As a rule, *islimi* style has one background, though experienced carvers sometimes make two- or three-plane carving when the pattern of the second layer becomes a background to the upper one. The prevailing patterns in *islimi* style are twisting, regularly intertwined plant vines, stalks with flower buds, flowers and leaves – all very in-





tricately combined. Sketches for *islimi* patterns are first drawn on a piece of paper and then copied on the work-piece by pouncing. The art of the master then lies in creating the proper background and revealing the natural beauty of the wood. The flat surface of *islimi* relief and its deep background are finished by applying a set of techniques called *pardoz*: the edges of the relief are made a little curved or right-angled; its surface is either polished or covered with diagonal notches; the background is left plain or is made dot-textured, thus creating the patterned basis for the ornament. In each region of Tajikistan they use their own *pardoz* techniques.

Tajik carvers use several species of trees for their works. Among them is *karagach*, a local species of the elm-tree. This tree grows thick and high and has hard fine texture feasible for fine intricate carving. *Karagach*, as well as *chinor* and walnut, are used for making fretted pillars and doors. Walnut is also used for making tables and boxes which, if polished,



look really exquisite. For *panjara* composite lattices local soft species of willow are preferable. Mulberry tree, so common in Tajikistan, is used for making musical instruments. Linden and apricot-tree are chosen mostly for inlays. Poplar, though being soft and light, is not strong enough, and is usually used for only very simple carving designs.

To find and cut down the required tree is only one part of the business. Fresh wood does not fit for woodcarving. It needs seasoning in a dry and warm place, with logs and planks being placed in a vertical position to prevent deformation.