



ČARM

ČARM (Av. *čarəman-*, OPers. *čarman-*, Khot. *tcārman-*, etc.; see Bailey, Dictionary, p. 140), skin, hide, and leather, which have had a variety of uses in Persia (Wulff, pp. 231-32). The earliest known use of the word *čarm* in Persian is in the inscription of Darius at Bīsotūn (DB 4.90): “on clay tablets [?] and on parchment [or leather? *carmā*] it was composed” (Kent, pp. 130, 132). That leather documents were kept in the Achaemenid royal archives is confirmed by a report from Ctesias of Cnidos (apud Diodorus Siculus, 2.32). Leather was also used for clothing in the Achaemenid period, as is clear from fragments of jackets excavated at the 4th-century b.c. Scythian site of Pazyryk in central Asia (Rice, fig. 41, pls. 4, 12).

Several leather documents from the Parthian period, said to have been found in Kurdistan, are in the British Museum (Minns, pp. 22 ff.; see [avroman documents](#)). Indeed, the fame of Persian leather seems to have spread throughout the antique world. The later Roman emperors wore knee-high “Parthian boots” of fine red leather (Pliny, 34.145; cf. *Camb. Hist. Iran III*, p. 560), and in China it was known that the Parthians wrote on parchment (Hirth). Leather belts, thongs, and straps of various kinds, as well as trousers and leggings, seem to have been increasingly common features of male clothing in Persia under the Parthians and Sasanians, probably owing to the influence of the nomadic warriors’ garb of Central Asia (see [belts ii](#); [clothing iii, iv](#)).

Evidence for the use of leather as a writing material in the Sasanian period comes mainly from later Arabic texts, though some documents in Persian



language on parchment, skin subjected to more refined processing than ordinary leather, have been found in Egypt (Grohmann, p. 107, n. 2), and fragments of leather from the 7th-8th centuries have been excavated from the Sogdian site of Mug and elsewhere in Soviet Turkistan (Ghirshman, p. 58; Krachkovskaya and Krachkovskii). Ebn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995 or 388/998) reported that the ancient Persians had been accustomed to writing on the skins of various animals: water buffalo, cows, and sheep (*Fehrest*, ed. Flügel, I, p. 21; tr. Dodge, I, p. 39). According to Balāḍorī (d. ca. 279/892; *Fotūḥ*, p. 464), Sasanian tax officials kept their registers on white skins until the emperor Ḳosrow Parvēz became so offended by the stench that he ordered them to be perfumed with saffron and rosewater, a custom that was taken over by the Muslims in Iraq.

Although animals that could provide skins and hides for leather (e.g., the cow, buffalo, sheep, goat, donkey, and camel) were of particular economic importance in Persia from earliest times, the first extant reports of trade in skins, hides, and leather products date only from the 4th/10th century. Ṭabarestān was particularly abundant in skins (Ebn Ḥawqal, tr. p. 371), and, according to *Ḥodūd al-ālam*, skins were tanned and exported from Anbīr in Gūzgān (*pūst-e gūzgānī*; fol. 21a; tr. Minorsky, p. 107; cf. Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 443; tr. Kramers and Wiet, p. 429). Shagreen (*kaymoḳt*; Moḳaddasī, p. 325; Ebn Faẓlān, tr. Togan, pp. 16, 122-24, Exk. 15b), a dyed untanned leather with a pebbly surface that was especially popular for boots, was made at Ābaskūn near the mouth of the Gorgān river (*Ḥodūd al-ālam*, fol. 29b; tr. Minorsky, p. 134). Fine shagreen saddles and other leather goods came from the Turks via Šāš (Čáč), bridles and stirrups from Samarqand and Qom, leather bottles from Māhrūbān and Tārom in Fārs (Moḳaddasī, pp. 325, 396, 442; cf. Spuler, p. 406). Leather shields and helmets were in use in the 3rd/9th century in Ṭabarestān (Ebn Esfandiār, tr. Browne, p. 145; cf. Spuler, p. 492). Shoemaking was the major industry at Qazvīn in 432/1040-41, when Nāṣer(-e) Ḳosrow visited there (*Safar-nāma*, p. 6). According to Edrīsī (p. 427) there were leather workshops in Zarand in the province of Kermān in the 5th/11th century. Throughout this period objects made of the skins of wild animals like antelope and gazelles (*lamṭ*) were particularly admired (Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 472; tr. p. 454; Yāqūt, IV, p. 350). Crimson deer hides were imported to T'ang (a.d. 618-907) China from Persia (Schafer, p. 106), as were gall nuts (*māzū*), used in tanning leather (Laufer, *Sino-Iranica*, pp. 367-68).

Reports of leather manufacture and trade in the Il-khanid period are



comparatively rare. One innovation was the employment of saddlers and tanners in government workshops (*Jāme' al-tawāriḳ*, Baku, pp. 542-45; cf. *Camb. Hist. Iran V*, p. 513). Saddles and bridles were a specialty of Kermān (Marco Polo, pp. 94, 106; cf. Spuler, *Die Mongolen*³, p. 437). Especially popular in this period were slippers with upturned toes and high boots; such footwear remained fundamentally unchanged into the Safavid period. Shiraz and Tabrīz were well known for manufacture of leather footwear and Tabrīz also for shagreen (Rašīd-al-Dīn, *Mokātabāt*, pp. 138ff., n. 34; cf. *Camb. Hist. Iran V*, p. 508). It was also in the 7th/13th century that the manufacture of leather bookbindings seems to have been introduced in Persia, where it became a fine art in succeeding centuries (See [bookbinding](#)).

In the lifetime of Tīmūr leather was one of the commodities traded in Samarqand (Clavijo, pp. 150, 171). Among the few innovations of the period was the introduction of low boots with heels (Shirazi-Mahajan, p. 246).

In Safavid times leather was produced in Persia in great quantities. According to Tavernier, the principal center for manufacture of shagreen (Pers. *sāḡarī*) was Tabrīz; the hides of asses were considered to have the best grain. Gemelli (p. 113) considered the shoemakers of Tabrīz unrivaled. In 1579 the English dyer Morgan Hubblethorne was instructed to learn the secret by which Persians made for the Safavid courtiers buskins in “Spanish leather” ornamented with brightly colored flowers (“Certaine Directions,” p. 454). Morocco leather was used for the shoes of poor people (Tavernier, p. 244), who preferred soles made from camel leather, which is the most durable. In the 11th/17th century the Dutch and English East India companies exported small quantities of leather products and shagreen from Persia (Lockhart, p. 385), and Persian shoemakers began to imitate contemporary European styles; such European shoes were considered uncomfortable by the poet Mīrzā Ṭāher Waḥīd Qazvīnī, for one (Keyvānī, p. 267). Kaempfer (pp. 118-25) mentions among the royal workshops (*boyūtāt-e salṭanatī*) one for shoes (*kafšdūz-kāna*) and one for bookbinding (*ṣaḥḥāf-kāna*). According to the early Qajar author Rostam-al-Ḥokamā' (pp. 100-01), whose account must, however, be used with discretion, in late Safavid times the court retinue included chiefs of the makers of horse trappings (*gerek-yarāq-bāšī*), the saddlers (*sarrāj-bāšī*), the bootmakers (*čakmadūz-bāšī*), the bookbinders (*ṣaḥḥāf-bāšī*), the pack-saddle makers (*akkāf-bāšī*), and the shoemakers (*kafšdūz*). The *sāḡarīdūz* made shoes for the rich and the middle class (Thevenot, II, p. 92; Mīrzā Ḥosayn, p. 99; Chardin, IV, pp. 131-32). In the 11th/17th century Armenians were particularly



engaged in making leather sieves (*garbāl*).

From the Qajar period there is more information on the organization of leather crafts, as well as some statistical information. The first step in making leather from skin was the soaking and scraping away of hair and adhering flesh and subsequent treatment in a solution containing tannin or a comparable agent; the entire process lasted a number of days. The procedures involved were carried out by the tanner, or *dabbāg* (see *dabbāgi*). Janāb distinguishes between a tanner of skin (*dabbāg-e pūst*) and a leather maker (*dabbāg-e čarm*), which suggests that the process had been broken down into two sets of operations. There were nine of the former and twenty-nine of the latter in Isfahan at the turn of the 14th/20th century (Janāb, p. 79). A specialized type of leather processor was the *sāgarčī*, who made the skins of pack and saddle animals into shagreen, which was commonly dyed green (Mīrzā Ḥosayn, p. 99; Binning, p. 131). Once it had been prepared, leather was turned into a wide range of products, including personal apparel. In the Qajar period Hamadān was famous for production of leather goods. As recently as 1338/1920 one-eighth of the city's population was making its living from tanning, in about 150 workshops (*RMM* 43, p. 222; *Persia*, p. 519). Leather crafts were in fact to be found in all large towns, but statistics are available only for cities like Tehran (Keyhān, II, pp. 327-33), Tabrīz (Jawādī, pp. 227-29), and Isfahan (Janāb, pp. 78-80) in the late Qajar period. In Tabrīz, for example, there were four tanneries employing sixty people, twenty bookbinders, and 120 shoemakers. The annual export of leather through the city amounted to 500 bales (E'temād-al-Salṭana, p. 419). Tabrīz was still the major Persian center of leather production in the early 1320s Š./1940s (*Persia*, p. 461). There was a considerable export of leather and skins to Russia, mainly from Hamadān and Tabrīz (Andreas and Stoltze, pp. 23, 78; McLean, p. 23; Gladowe-Newcomen, p. 88).

Craftsmen known as *kaffāš*, *kafšsāz*, *kafšgar*, or *kafšdūz* made leather footwear for men and women; the *kafšdūz* also made leggings (*zangāl*), which were cheaper than boots and were thus preferred by tribesmen, grooms, and muleteers (Mīrzā Ḥosayn, pp. 98-99; Wills, p. 234; for the technology of traditional shoemaking, see Wulff, p. 234). Mīrzā Ḥosayn noted the existence of several more specialized leather craftsmen in Isfahan, though their business had declined by the 1310s/1890s: the *gorjīdūz* (maker of Georgian shoes for women), the *orosīdūz* (maker of Russian boots, which had become quite popular), the *čarmīdūz* (maker of traditional leather shoes, which had



lost popularity among urban dwellers and were worn only by merchants and some mullas), the *čakmadūz* (bootmaker, whose work was much in demand because of the large number of soldiers and government officials in Isfahan), and the *sāgarīdūz* (maker of the shagreen slippers worn by men and women of the nobility; for details about various types of shoes produced in Tehran around the turn of the 14th/20th century see Šahrī, pp. 210-15, 234). Hatmakers (*kolāhdūz*) also sometimes used leather in their products, especially for linings (Mīrzā Ḥosayn, p. 98).

Military equipment made of leather included shields, bucklers, helmets, quivers, powderhorns, and bags. The shield maker was called *separdūz* and the maker (repairman) of quivers *tarkašdūz* (Goļčīn-e Ma‘ānī, pp. 126-27); in the 14th/20th century the *tarkašdūz* was a general harnessmaker, who made and sold harness, saddles, holsters, and similar goods (Wulff, p. 234; Wills, p. 190). Saddles (*zīn*) were made by specialized craftsmen (*sarrāj*, *zīnsāz*, or *zīngar*). Leather trappings for pack animals (*gerek-yarāq*) included reins and bridles, as well as pack saddles (*pālān*), made by the *pālāndūz* (also called *pālāngar*, *pālānī*, *akkāf*). There were also makers of leather saddlebags (*korjīnsāz*).

Sundries included tubes (*ney*) for water pipes made by the *neypīčsāz* (Mīrzā Ḥosayn, p. 109; cf. Wulff, p. 236), leather buckets (*dalw*) and water vessels made by the *dalwdūz* or *dalwsāz* (Mīrzā Ḥosayn, p. 100; cf. Wulff, p. 234), and sieves (*gārbāl*) made by the *gārbālband*, *gārbālsāz*, or *gārbālbāf* (Keyvānī, p. 181). According to Hans Wulff (pp. 234-35), in the 14th/20th century the gypsies (*kowlī*) have specialized in this last production. Patchers, or *pāradūz*, were a special class of craftsmen who repaired and mended shoes, water buckets, and the like (Mīrzā Ḥosayn, p. 100; Goļčīn-e Ma‘ānī, p. 160.)

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