



A JOURNEY THROUGH THE HISTORY OF CRAFT TERMS AND THEIR THEMATIC GROUPS

Abduvalieva Khulkaroy Lutfulla kizi

Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages, Faculty of English
Philology, Teaching Methodology and Translation Studies, Teacher of
the Department of the Integrated Course of English Language Teaching

abduvaliyevahulkaroy@gmail.com

Phone number: +998940270212

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Annotation: This comprehensive article explores the evolution of craft terms and their thematic groups throughout human history. It begins with the primitive tools of early craftsmanship, progresses through ancient civilizations with their specialized trades, examines the impact of medieval guilds on craft terminology, delves into the fusion of art and craft during the Renaissance, explores the industrial revolution's influence on mass production terminology, and discusses the contemporary revival of handmade craftsmanship. The narrative extends into the digital age, showcasing the emergence of terms related to technological craftsmanship. The article emphasizes the dynamic nature of craft language, shaped by cultural, technological, and societal shifts.

Key Words: Craftsmanship, Thematic Groups, Guilds, Renaissance, Industrial Revolution, Artisanal, Digital Age, CAD (Computer-Aided Design, Additive Manufacturing, Craftivism

Introduction:

The evolution of craft terms and their thematic groups is a fascinating journey that intertwines with the development of human civilization. From the early days of primitive tools to the sophisticated techniques of modern craftsmanship, the language used to describe and categorize these practices has undergone significant transformations. This article explores the rich history of craft terms, tracing their origins, development, and the thematic groups that have emerged over time.

The word 'Craft' comes from the Middle English word for 'strength' or 'skill' derived from the Old English word *craeft* which comes from Old High German *kraft*, for strength, and means "skill in planning, making, executing" and, by extension, "an occupation or [trade](#) requiring skill" and crafts, then, being those objects resulting from the application of that skill (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Every [civilization](#) has developed their own crafts and the term can be applied to numerous aspects

Crafts in the ancient world, both in their purpose and how they were manufactured, were as varied as the cultures which produced them. In ancient [Mesopotamia](#), crafts were produced both by order of the state and privately. As early as 6500 BCE flax textiles were in use in the region known as Tepe Sabz (modern day Iran) and flax was woven both privately and by state workers prior to the rise of wool. From the [city of Ur](#) we have the [Sumerian](#) Standard of [War](#) and the Standard of Peace, both commissioned by the State and wrought by those whom, today, would be known as government employees.

At the same time, however, there were many private artists producing their own, more personal, works (also as early as 6500 BCE, from which time [pottery](#) has been found) such as the statue Ram Caught In A Thicket from Ur c. 2800 BCE, an elaborate piece composed of shells, lapis lazuli and [gold](#) depicting a ram (or goat) struggling to free itself from a bush. While the Sumerian standards are utilitarian works, providing a narrative of the [culture](#) at peace or at war, pieces like Ram Caught In A Thicket often depicted scenes from daily life or symbolic representations of the gods as it has been speculated that the Ram statue symbolized the male energy principle of the [god](#) Tammuz caught in the "thicket" of the female deity [Inanna/Ishtar](#). Inanna/Ishtar is regularly depicted as a difficult character who often ensnared her lovers in webs of difficulty.

As early as 6200 BCE [copper](#) was being smelted in [Anatolia](#) in the south of the Mesopotamian region and copper grew in importance as it became more readily available. It would eventually prove to be an increasingly valuable commodity in trade as well as for domestic use.

In ancient [Egypt](#) the most important artisans were the metalsmiths who produced the bowls, vases, cups, statues and figurines, even the swords and daggers, one sees today in museums around the world. The metalsmiths worked primarily in copper mined from the Sinai peninsula until the [Middle Kingdom](#) (2040-1782 BCE) when [bronze](#) (a mixture of copper and tin) was introduced, the tin coming from the hills of [Elam](#) southeast of [Babylon](#).

Without a doubt, however, the most widely used metal in ancient Egypt was gold which was mined in plenty from the quartz-bearing rock in the eastern desert and south of Egypt in Nubia and the Sudan. The famous [tomb](#) of [Tutankhamun](#), discovered by Howard Carter in the early 1920's CE is the best testament to the many uses the metalsmiths could put gold to, as they fashioned the substance into everything from the ornate [death](#) mask to the coffin to the cups, bracelets and jewelry found in the tomb. According to the historian [Herodotus](#), the [Egyptian](#) metalsmiths were known as the most skilled artisans in the world and their surviving works bear witness to the truth of Herodotus' claim.

Crafts in ancient [Greece](#) reached their height in the production of ceramics (from the [Greek](#) word *ceramos* for 'wet clay') which was one of Greece's main state industries as well as a work produced privately by individual artists. The production of Greek ceramics began on the island kingdom of [Crete](#) around 2500 BCE as evidenced by archaeological finds at [Knossos](#) and [Gortyn](#). The most famous style of pottery was the Black-Figure Style where figures in black were drawn against an earthen-red background (or vice versa in the Red-Figure Style) to tell a story in linear form. These stories could range from mythological tales to personal family narratives and were most famously admired by the English poet John Keats in his Ode on A Grecian Urn in which he extols the virtues of the "still unravished bride of quietness" and longs for the eternal youth and beauty depicted on the urn. Other ceramic vessels were the [amphora](#) used primarily for wine and found in abundance in the wrecks of the Phoenician vessels Tanit and [Elissa](#) discovered in 1999 CE by Bob Ballard. The hydria (used primarily for water) and the crater were two other types of ceramic products. The crater was a broad rimmed ceramic supported by a short cylinder on a base; both forms are still in use today as vases and mixing bowls.

The Romans drew upon the cultures which had gone before in their production of crafts (as they did in every other aspect of their culture) to create fine works of art but, as befitting their pragmatic nature, they excelled in crafts which were more utilitarian than aesthetic. The

greatest craftsmen of ancient [Rome](#) were the plumbers (from the Latin plumium for lead) who wrought the great pipes which brought water into, and out of, the city of Rome and nearby [Ostia](#) and the masons who shaped the stones which went to create the roads, buildings and temples. From Galicia, Spain down to Trier, across Germany and all the way to Egypt, the craftsmanship of the [Roman](#) builders can still be seen today in roads still useable and the aquaducts which stretch across [Europe](#).

In the first millennium BCE, the Phoenicians would send their ships up across the Atlantic to what would become the English isles to load on great quantities of tin to mix with the plentiful copper of the [Mediterranean](#) to create bronze. Why the [Phoenicians](#) did not also mine from the Elam hills, as the Egyptians did, is unclear. In 200 BCE iron manufacturing in the [Celtic](#) world, starting around the area now known as Cornwall, underwent a significant boom and the [iron age](#) would change every aspect of the lives of those who lived in the Celtic lands and beyond.

Crafts were an integral part of the lives of the people who created and used them. More importantly, perhaps, they were an expression of the culture and of the lives of the people at a given time. Archaeologists regularly report that they value ceramics in their finds above gold, [silver](#), or other precious treasure because ceramics tell the most accurate and honest story about daily life at a site. The people of the past, just like those of today, did not always lead lives of grand adventure or excitement but still had stories to tell of great passion and enduring fascination. These stories were told through the crafts they created and today, many thousands of years later, one may read these stories still and admire the works of the early artists.

Early Craftsmanship and Basic Tools:

The roots of craft terms can be traced back to prehistoric times when humans first began to craft basic tools for survival. The earliest forms of craftsmanship involved the shaping of stones, bones, and wood to create tools for hunting, cooking, and shelter. The vocabulary of this era focused on elemental concepts such as carving, shaping, and assembling, laying the foundation for the terminology that would evolve over the centuries.

Ancient Civilizations and Specialized Craftsmanship:

As civilizations flourished, so did the diversity and specialization of craftsmanship. In ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, various crafts emerged, each with its unique set of terms. Metalworking, pottery, weaving, and carpentry became distinct disciplines, and a specialized vocabulary developed to describe the techniques and tools associated with each craft. The creation of written language systems further facilitated the codification of craft terms.

Medieval Guilds and Craftsmanship Codes:

The medieval period saw the rise of guilds, organized groups of skilled craftsmen who established rules and standards for their respective trades. Craftsmanship became not only an art but also a profession, and guilds played a pivotal role in shaping the terminology used within specific trades. The language of craftsmanship became more formalized, with apprentices learning a standardized set of terms as part of their training.

Renaissance and the Fusion of Art and Craft:

The Renaissance marked a period of immense creativity and innovation, blurring the lines between art and craft. This era saw the emergence of polymaths who excelled in multiple

disciplines. Craft terms expanded to encompass not only technical aspects but also aesthetic principles. The vocabulary of craftsmanship became more nuanced, reflecting a deeper understanding of the relationship between form and function.

Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Mass Production:

The Industrial Revolution brought about a seismic shift in craftsmanship. Mass production replaced traditional handmade methods, and new terms emerged to describe mechanized processes. Concepts such as assembly line, automation, and precision engineering became integral to the vocabulary of manufacturing. Craft terms adapted to the changing landscape, reflecting the shift from individual craftsmanship to large-scale production.

Contemporary Craftsmanship and the Revival of Handmade:

In recent decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in handmade, artisanal products. The contemporary crafting movement has given rise to new terms that celebrate individual creativity, sustainability, and craftsmanship. Words like upcycling, handmade, and bespoke have gained prominence, reflecting a cultural shift towards valuing the unique and the authentic.

Digital Age and Technological Craftsmanship:

In the 21st century, the advent of digital technology has given rise to a new set of craft terms related to 3D printing, digital fabrication, and virtual craftsmanship. Terms like "computer-aided design" (CAD) and "additive manufacturing" showcase the integration of technology into traditional crafting processes. The intersection of digital innovation and craftsmanship has created a dynamic and evolving lexicon that continues to expand with the rapid pace of technological advancement.

Conclusion: The history of craft terms is a dynamic narrative that mirrors the evolution of human ingenuity and creativity. From the rudimentary tools of our ancestors to the sophisticated craftsmanship of the present day, the language used to describe these practices has continuously adapted to technological, cultural, and societal changes. Understanding the history of craft terms provides insight into the development of human skills, knowledge, and the enduring quest for innovation in the realm of craftsmanship. The history of craft terms is an intricate tapestry woven through the fabric of human civilization. From the rudimentary tools of our ancestors to the sophisticated craftsmanship of the present day, the language used to describe these practices has continuously adapted and evolved. This linguistic evolution reflects not only advancements in technology and technique but also the changing values and priorities of societies throughout history. Craft terms, with their rich history and thematic groups, stand as a testament to the ingenuity and creativity of humanity across the ages.

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