

Non-sculptural metalworking in eastern Tibet c.1930–1959

John Clarke

This paper examines the organisation of the traditional non-sculptural metalworking industries of Khams during the period 1930–1959 using information gathered from living craftsmen and other members of the community in exile. The extended farming family, as the predominant socio-economic structure within which work was carried out, is first discussed. The question of whether workers were part or full time and the impact this had on their work is then examined. The most significant metalworking centres: the villages of Derge, Dagyab and others on the eastern Chinese border are then outlined and their specialities and reputations examined. The focus then shifts to the question of whether a discrete eastern Tibetan style of domestic and ritual objects exists and what criteria might be used to discern it. This is related to the further issue of the extent and frequency of the movement of Khampa craftsmen to other areas. Evidence for the presence of such workers in this government workshop in Lhasa is given. It is shown that while relatively few eastern Tibetan silver-, gold- or ironsmiths lived in central Tibet, the highly prized metalwork of their area was frequently brought to the capital and copied there.