

# Giveh-bafi, a prevalent handicraft in Zanzan Province



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The northwestern province of Zanzan is a main center of handicraft production in Iran. Archaeological findings also testify to the antiquity of the handicraft industry in the province.

*Giveh-bafi* is a handicraft which is very prevalent in Zanzan Province. *Giveh* is a kind of soft, comfortable, durable, handmade shoe that is common in several parts of Iran, IRNA wrote.

Experts believe that in the past, *giveh* was produced in many Iranian cities with a dry climate. The craft of *giveh-bafi* displays a combination of male and female art, unlike embroidery, for example.

Presently, the craft is still alive in a few Iranian cities including Zanzan.

The craftspeople and experts of the province believe that modern methods should be

employed to preserve the art and prepare conditions for producers to sell their works to other provinces of the country, and even export them to foreign countries.

Soghra Mohammadi is an artist who has been involved *giveh-bafi* for 30 years. She said she has presented various ideas to make the industry flourish and profitable in the province.

"I went through a lot of ups and downs to achieve success. I am happy that our craft has become more popular among the public now," she said.

She continued that she is making efforts to make *giveh-bafi* of Zanzan Province a brand to encourage tourists to buy this traditional footwear as a souvenir, stressing that improving the designs and diversifying the colors is a prerequisite for achieving this target.

"*Givehs* of Zanzan are woven

using a crochet hook," she said, adding that the method is different from those employed in other parts of the country."

Mohammadi said that she uses embroidery and painting arts on *givehs* to make them more attractive for customers, pointing out that, currently, a large number of artists are involved in the craft and the market is saturated with this type of product.

She said that *giveh* can only be used in the first six months of the year, however, the period is longer in regions with a warm climate.

The artisan continued that a limited number of individuals wore *givehs* in the past, while presently the use of the traditional shoe is more prevalent among people.

She called for the officials at the province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organizations and other relat-

ed bodies to support the craft and prepare conditions for the *giveh* producers to introduce their products.

Deputy Head of Zanzan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization Seyyed Mikaeil Mousavi said that *giveh* is a kind of summer footwear, which is lightweight, durable and suitable for long walks.

He added that the top of *giveh* is made of cotton, while its sole is made of leather.

He said that the art of *giveh-bafi* has recently flourished again and a large number of people wear these shoes for their long walks.

Mousavi noted that about 3,000 *giveh* weavers are active throughout the province, adding that a prominent artist produced 16,000 pairs of *giveh* per month, which has been the highest number in the province.

## Kubachi wares

The name "Kubachi" will be familiar to most students of Islamic art as well as to ethnographers dealing with the complex demographics of Daghestan in the Caucasus. The fact that hoards of art pottery were discovered in the homes of mountain villagers in the late nineteenth century has cast a mystique over these wares, clouding our understanding of their significance. Kubachi lies some 60km southwest of the Caspian town of Derbent in the north Caucasus, in the autonomous republic of Daghestan, formerly within the Soviet Union. Situated above the treeline, the village lands do not offer the possibility of extensive agriculture.

Houses make the best possible use of the sloping land. The multi-storey traditional stone houses climb the hillside of Kubachi, their balconies serving as roofs for the houses below. Streets consist of a series of steps winding up the hill between houses. It is difficult to imagine how such a village came to possess large collections of luxury tablewares.

Although some pottery still remains in the homes of the villagers, huge quantities were purchased by European, Armenian, and Russian agents from the 1870s on. The vessels arrived in museum collections toward the end of the century and during the first decade of the twentieth century. Even though their Kubachi origins may not have been recorded, they are easily identified by their having a series of holes drilled in the foot-ring, through which a cord was threaded for hanging in the houses of the village. Many even retain these cords. Safavid pots recovered in Iran itself, such as those purchased by Sir Robert Murdoch Smith for the Victoria and Albert Museum in the late nineteenth century, seem to be devoid of such holes. Most vessels found at Kubachi also show a crackling of the glaze as well as an oily substance or "varnish" on the surface, as observed by Brocklebank in 1931.

All scholars except the very first to see these wares

have doubted that the villagers of Kubachi actually produced them or even that they came from a nearby source, such as Derbent. Some of the wares from this site had already been acquired for the collections of the Royal Ontario Museum by 1907. Dikran Khan Kelekian brought back large quantities of objects from Kubachi and mentioned the pottery in his publication of 1909. While accepting a local provenance for all this pottery, he nevertheless warned that it raises many questions that will never be resolved without excavations in Daghestan and Iran. The major questions posed by the ceramic material were set forth by Arthur Lane in the article entitled, "The so-called 'Kubachi' Wares of Persia," in the Burlington Magazine (1939). The title itself reveals his opinion about the provenance of the wares, namely, that none of them was made in Kubachi. He pointed out that similar types have been purchased in Iran, and that the figural style was unquestionably



that of the court of Shah Abbas of Isfahan of the early seventeenth century. An Iranian source for the pottery was far more likely than a remote mountain village. Lane hypothesized a Tabriz origin for all the wares, including those that did not belong to the polychrome slip-painted group. Since then little interest has been shown in this assemblage despite its preponderance in museum collections and the attractiveness of some of the groups. Only the three

or four fifteenth-century pieces that bear dates have received attention. They are presumed to represent the earliest phase of a single workshop. On stylistic grounds alone the pottery found at Kubachi ranges from the mid-fifteenth century to the end of the seventeenth century and possibly later. Petrographic analysis — and occasionally inscriptions — show that the Kubachi aggregation is not the work of a single pottery centre.



Most of the Kubachi vessels with dated inscriptions are painted in black under a clear turquoise glaze and range in date from 1468 to 1495.3 They have a Neyshabur petrofabric. A dish painted in blue on white and dated 1473-1474 reveals a Mashhad provenance in its inscription. One of the largest groups found at Kubachi originated in the Turkman and early Safavid workshops at Tabriz. Kubachi seems to be the only source for whole ves-

sels from the Tabriz workshop, while vessels with Neyshabur and Mashhad petrofabric have been found in Iran. However, sherds with a Tabriz petrofabric have turned up in excavations at Ardebil (unpublished). These are mostly from dishes, painted in cobalt blue under a clear glaze or black under a transparent turquoise or green glaze. Kubachi aggregation are diverse, comprising products of Neyshabur, Mashhad, and Tabriz.