

# Pottery handicrafts of Lalejin dazzle the eyes of every viewer



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## Iranica Desk

The city of Lalejin in the western province of Hamedan is known by its earthenware products. Thanks to the art of pottery, Lalejin not only has no unemployed residents but is a destination for job seekers from neighboring regions. The inhabitants of Lalejin speak a special Azari dialect, which is different from the Azerbaijani dialect. The pottery artifacts manufactured by the people of this city dazzle the eyes of every viewer, both Iranian and foreign.

Lalejin, with a population of 20,000, is the main center of earthenware production in Iran and the Middle East, [chtn.ir](http://chtn.ir) wrote. According to the results of

the archeological excavations carried out in the city, the history of human settlement in the region dates back to the 11th century. Lalejin is located in a relatively flat plain, seven kilometers from the provincial capital city of Hamedan, and a large number of its residents is engaged in farming. Previously, the gardens and agricultural fields of the city were irrigated by springs, flowing rivers and wells. A number of qanats dating back to the Safavid period (1501-1736 CE) can still be seen in the north and northwest of the city. Lalejin has been severely destroyed twice in history, once by the invasion of Mongols and a second time by the invasion of Afghans.

The Mohajeran Grand Mosque, dating back to the Qajar era, is one of the most important historical monuments of Lalejin. It has several stone columns, a dome-shaped roof and a large courtyard. Lalejin celebrated its registration as 'The Pottery Capital of the World' in 2016, a privilege granted by the jurors of the UNESCO-affiliated World Crafts Council. More than 900 units are involved in pottery production, sales and exports, in which 60 percent of local people are working. The history of ceramic production in Lalejin dates back 700 years. When you walk on the streets of this ancient city, you will see countless women, men and children, who are creating

beautiful works of art. The pottery items produced by the craftspeople of Lalejin are exported to many foreign countries. Moreover, a huge number of Iranian and foreign tourists travel to Lalejin every year to purchase earthenware produced in the city. The variety of the colors and designs of Lalejin pottery catch the eyes of every viewer. A major number of these artistic earthenware are used as decorative pieces; however, some of them including clay dishes and pitchers are used in everyday life. The smell of clay and mud in the pottery workshops makes breathing very pleasant. Touching a pottery item gives you a wonderful feel-

ing, perhaps because it is a product of the combination of the four elements of matter: earth, water, air and fire. Since all these elements have been found across the world from the beginning of creation, humans have practiced this art since ancient times. The ancient pottery items that witnessed the development of life and human civilization throughout history tell countless stories about people who have never been heroes, but lived. Considering Iran's special geographic location, at the crossroads of ancient civilizations, people of almost every part of the country have been engaged in pottery-making throughout history.



## Persian Art in Romania

Romania's proximity to the Oriental world favoured the circulation of Islamic art objects, including Persian artefacts. But because of the vicissitudes of history, only a few of them were preserved, although we can still see them represented in paintings or mentioned by old documents. In the second half of the 19th century Romania tried to assimilate the western life style, and the Oriental objects belonging to the daily life were suddenly looked upon as obsolete, as a reminder of the past that should be left behind. Since then, such objects have been kept in the newly created museums and libraries. The effort to assimilate the western civilization thus remains a priority for the Romanian society as a whole, while artists try to synchronise their creation with the

European artistic trends, especially French. It is noteworthy, for instance, that Romanian painting evolved in only a few decades from the Byzantine tradition to European modern art. Nevertheless, the familiarity with the aesthetics of the Islamic lands makes a subtle breakthrough, and this is how we can explain the artistic interest in Oriental objects such as kilims or tribal items, whose refinement was perceived in West Europe only a few decades later.

### Historical background

Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, the three historic provinces which form today's Romania, evolved in different cultural conditions: Moldavia and Walachia emulated the Byzantine civilisation, whereas Transylvania was



An Iznik Tile

part of the Central-European cultural area. Despite the Ottoman suzerainty, these regions preserved a certain autonomy as they were not under Turkish

administration. The united principalities of Moldavia and Walachia became independent in 1877. The attempts to oppose the Ottoman pressure were

mostly military, but also diplomatic, as this was the case, for instance, with the negotiations between Stephen the Great (1457-1502 CE), the prince of Moldavia, and Uzun Hasan (1453-78 CE), the ruler of Persia, in order to form an anti-Ottoman alliance. This diplomatic episode was indeed unique, but the commercial relations with West Asia, including Persia, were constant. The objects from this region including textiles, carpets and arms were brought to the Romanian principalities via Istanbul for internal use or to be exported in Central or West Europe. Romanian documents began to mention Persian items, though in smaller quantity than Ottoman products, as early as the 17th century. Persian carpets were, for instance, widely available

in the Romanian provinces at the very beginning of the 17th century, as hundreds of them, including silk carpets and also kilims, are mentioned in documents of the Movila family, one Moldavian princely family related to the Polish nobility. A Moldavian ruling prince (voivode), Vasile Lupu (1634-1653 CE), may also have had "Polonaise" rugs in his palace, according to a contemporary Latin document which describes "halls set with carpets woven with golden thread." Evidence is given for other Islamic objects belonging to this voivode, who is also known for his so-called "halls with *chini*." The halls were decorated with ceramic tiles coming presumably from Iznik workshops, where Vasile Lupu had also ordered a commemorative tablet in-

scribed with the names of all his family. This voivode, so much inclined to luxury, often amazed foreign travellers who had the opportunity to meet him and who described the richness of his attire in their memoirs. The clothes worn by voivodes or grand boyars (high-ranking members of the Walachian and Moldavian aristocracies) were made of precious Oriental or Italian materials with enormous value; this explains why they were often part of princely donations to churches or monasteries. This is particularly the case with two 16th-century garments — a velvet caftan and a woman's sarasars court robe, both of Ottoman origin — which were transformed and used in churches, the first as a cover, the second as an ecclesiastical cope.