

Iran's National Jewelry Museum, a treasured legacy of splendor



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A magnificent assortment of royal jewels, amassed over centuries by various monarchs throughout Iran's history, is truly awe-inspiring. The opportunity to witness the world's largest jewel collection is not one to be missed. If you're intrigued, make sure to visit the National Jewelry Museum. Each piece housed in this extraordinary museum embodies a rich tapestry of history, encapsulating both poignant and triumphant moments, reflecting the pride and aspirations of rulers, whether powerful or vulnerable.

Located on Ferdowsi Avenue, in one of the buildings of the Central Bank of Iran, in Tehran, the museum showcases the Treasury of National Jewels. Some of the jewels in this collection date back to prehistoric times, serving as adornments for rulers in bygone eras. Moreover, they epitomize the grandeur and opulence of their courts, as well as their authority and affluence. These priceless relics of Iranian royalty are now

under the custodianship of the Central Bank of Iran.

The worth of these treasures transcends mere economic value, embodying the ingenuity and artistry of Iranian craftsmen and artists across different periods of Iranian history. It stands as a testament to Iran's rich artistic and cultural heritage.

This heritage has deeply influenced various aspects of Iranian culture, such as architecture, design, fashion, customs, and art, merging to provide insight into the authentic Persian culture. Prior to the Islamic Revolution, these jewels were often worn during formal occasions, including weddings and coronations.

The value of this collection is immeasurable. It contains gems that are unparalleled in the world, defying precise evaluation. From an artistic perspective, historical significance, and possession of incomparable jewels, the Treasury of National Jewels stands at a level that

even the most seasoned evaluators worldwide have been unable to appraise accurately.

The collection of Iran's Imperial Crown Jewels traces its origins back to the Safavid era, with subsequent monarchs expanding and enriching it. Before the Safavid dynasty, certain jewels existed in government treasuries, but it was during the Safavid era that foreign travelers, including Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, Chevalier Chardin, the Shirley brothers, and others, began to make note of these treasuries. The Safavid monarchs meticulously gathered rare and exquisite gems over two centuries, with gem specialists from their court sourcing fine stones from the markets of India, the Ottoman Empire, as well as European countries like France and Italy.

Following the rule of Shah Soltan Hosein of the Safavid dynasty and Mahmud Hotak's invasion of Iran, the treasury was dispersed, with some jewels taken

by Mahmud Hotak, and transferred to his cousin and vicegerent, Ashraf Hotak. It was Shah Tahmasb and Nader who reclaimed the national jewels for Isfahan. Nader safeguarded the jewels within the country and sought to retrieve those that had been taken to India, although his efforts were in vain.

Some of these treasures never made it back to Iran from India, likely lost or stolen. After returning to Iran, Nader distributed part of the spoils as gifts to neighboring rulers and soldiers in his army, in keeping with tradition. Following Nader's assassination, one of his commanders looted the treasury, leading to the departure of one famous jewel that never returned to Iran — the renowned Koh-e-Noor (Mountain of Light) diamond. This diamond passed into the hands of Ahmad Shah Durrani, and later to Ranjit Singh of Punjab. After his defeat by the British government, the Koh-e-Noor diamond came under the possession of the East India Compa-

ny, eventually being presented to Queen Victoria as a gift in 1850.

Subsequently, there were no significant changes in the treasury until the era of the Qajar dynasty. During their reign, the Treasury was meticulously catalogued and expanded. Some of the stones were set in the Kiani Crown, the Nader Throne, the Globe of Jewels, and the Peacock Throne (or the Sun Throne). Two additional items gradually incorporated into this Treasury are the turquoise, sourced from local mines, and the pearls harvested from the Persian Gulf.

In 1937, a significant portion of the Treasury was transferred to the Bank Melli of Iran in accordance with the approved law. This portion formed part of the reserves for note issues and later became collateral for government liabilities to the bank. Now, you have the opportunity to visit this exceptional collection of precious stones that have been amassed over centuries.

Artistic transition in second half of 16th century

Scholars of the Persian miniature are inclined to believe that the last quarter of the 16th century was not only a time when old traditions were followed but when a new style was formed which found its expression in the works of the Isfahan school.

Unfortunately, other branches of Persian art of the 16th century, above all applied arts such as ceramics, carpets and textiles, although they are represented by hundreds of examples in the world's museums, have not yet been sufficiently researched to enable one to confirm or deny the idea that a new phase in the history of art was formed in the second half of the 16th century. Perhaps the lack of thorough research on these materials, and especially on the evolution of their ornamentation, is a factor here.

But it is possible to assume that the changes in art during the second

half of the 16th century were not as great as during the second half of the 14th century and therefore they are not reflected in all art forms (for example, it is entirely unclear whether there were any sort of changes in architecture). In other words, we can now consider the second half of the 16th century to be a time of transition to a new phase, although this latter is not as clearly distinguishable as its predecessors. It is therefore difficult to speak of a canon style during this phase.

We now see a renewal of interest in representations of the human form, which is probably most clearly visible in textiles, although one may suppose that such fabrics do not represent a large proportion of the entire range of textile production. In 17th-century ceramics the strong influence of Chinese art can again be observed, but now aroused by the interest of Europeans in Chinese porcelain. Other

art forms do not seem to experience any new Chinese influences. During this phase active contacts with European art begin — first of all in painting. Traces of European influence can already be observed in the mid-17th century. First and foremost, this influence involves the court miniature, but it then spreads to other branches of art where it is reflected to varying degrees.

Here it is important to stress the fact that interest in European art initially arose in court circles, although there were various channels through which the influence was transmitted.

Apparently, the appearance of this new factor in 17th-century Persian art did not yet signify the emergence of a separate phase, nor even the onset of a transitional period — which became noticeable only from the end of the 17th century. An analysis of metalwork serves to support this argument.

Although there are few precisely dated pieces from the late 17th and early 18th centuries, a chronological series can be reconstructed. Changes are noticeable which could be explained by a decline in the quality of pieces, linked to their increased mass-production. For example, on copper and bronze (brass) items, the surface of the background to the design is not entirely hatched. Although hatching was obligatory during the 17th century; we now see in places only the engraved design against a plain background.

The omission of the hatching increases during the first half of the 18th century and around the middle of the century a complete break with tradition takes place, for in the second half of the century the background of Iranian copper and bronze (brass) objects is tooled with punches and the hatching disappears completely.



17th Century Iranian luster-painted bottle