

Dezak Castle, a symbol of Bakhtiari heritage and grandeur



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Dezak Castle is situated in the southeast of Dezak village, serving as a prominent tourist attraction in Shahr-e Kord, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province. Revered as one of the oldest and most captivating historical castles in the region, it stands as a testament to the area's rich heritage. The province boasts several castles, each holding significant historical value. During the Constitutional Revolution and the conquest of Tehran, Dezak Castle played a pivotal role as one of the foremost strongholds of the Bakhtiari people.

This castle, mansion, and residential home have been passed down through generations of the Bakhtiari Ilkhans. Covering an area of 20,576 square meters, the castle was constructed by Amir Mofakham, an Iranian military and statesman of the Qajar period. Initially, the castle comprised a skeletal struc-

ture and a ground floor, later expanding to include a mansion, second floor, private quarters, and ornate elements.

Originally designed as a military fortress, this historical edifice, featuring two floors, evolved into a palace-like structure due to its intricate decorations and interior design. The first floor boasts an octagonal entrance at its center, leading to expansive courtyards on both sides. Four *ivans* (porticos) grace the northern and southern sides of the octagon. Notably, the entrance and northern ivans of the first-floor exhibit columns adorned with reed-shaped patterns, erected on wooden beams.

The *Sofreh-Khaneh* Hall is one of the important sections of the castle. It is adorned with beautiful gypsum decorations and features a fifty-square-meter carpet, which is said to be around ninety years old, and is one of the most valuable and exquisite Bakhtiari carpets in terms of texture and pattern. The upper

margins of the hall walls and around the main doors and entrance are adorned with plasterwork. Mythical paintings of angels, lions and hunting are seen in this hall.

The building's ceiling is made of wood and the domed doors are installed in a nested manner for each entrance, all made of twisted wire on walnut wood. The building is also noteworthy in terms of stonemasonry. The stone carvings are mostly placed on the walls of the water basin, fountains, columns, and also under the columns, all of which are said to have been done under the supervision of a famous stone carver.

Mirror room

Next to the *sofreh-khaneh* there is a room known as the mirror room, referred to in Persian as *talar-e ayeneh*.

The mirror room is actually one of the eight surviving original rooms of this type in the region. This hall is one of the

exceptional and special sections of the castle. The ceiling and walls of the hall are adorned with magnificent mirrors. This room is built in a European style and bears resemblance to the mirrors of European palaces.

The mirror room features three-dimensional glass paintings. The paintings generally depict images of horseback riding, palaces, and royal buildings with European designs, floral and bird motifs, and their exteriors. In the mirror room, some framed photos of Bakhtiari nobles are installed. It is said that the mirror works of the building have been carried out by prominent Isfahani masters. Four mirror frames are designed on the east and west walls of *sofreh-khaneh*, which apparently have been added to the hall in later periods.

Two of the four towers of this structure are still standing. The foundations and main walls of the building have been meticulously designed to minimize

heat exchange, entirely covered with brick on the outer facade and embedded with mud bricks. The exterior facade has been whitewashed with a layer of gypsum.

This building features four conical towers with no military use, with two towers in the southern section intact and two towers in the northern section partially ruined. It was primarily constructed to exude grandeur and splendor and was used for storage and as a prison.

The external brick cover of the fortress is adorned with brick-working art, combined with glossy geometric tile work, creating beautiful patterns. The combination of brick and tile with various designs on the inscriptions is used.

In this way, two large and symmetrical inscriptions at the corner of the staircase inside the courtyard hold significant artistic value.

Persian influence on Viennese collections in 19th century

During the 19th century the collection of objects from the Islamic world in Vienna increased and expanded due to various different factors. During the second half of the century travel became much cheaper and easier thanks to the development of new technologies like steamboats and trains.

At the same time, the art market became more international. The animosity between the Habsburgs and the Ottomans, that had dominated politics during the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries, ceased after the last war in the late 1780s — a circumstance that eased trade. Relations were so good that the Ottoman Empire was even represented by Austria during the Congress of Vienna in 1814-8.

Due to the geographic proximity of the Ottoman and Habsburg dominions, the largest quantity of objects from the Islamic world in Vienna, including, among other things, weapons and carpets, originated in the Ottoman Empire. Persia being farther away than the Ottoman Empire contributed fewer items to Viennese collections but most of the Persian goods in Vienna are of high artistic quality.

With the increasing number of institutions and collectors in the 19th century, many more objects than before could be acquired and integrated into the extant collections. Expeditions were outfitted and brought back both valuable knowledge and objects. Interests in foreign regions developed further and became

more scholarly at the same time. Especially during the so-called Viennese Gründerzeit, marked by a considerable economic boom, the fashion for collecting gained momentum.

Aristocratic, bourgeois and scientific collecting existed alongside imperial collecting on a much smaller scale for centuries but these collectors focused on more particular types of goods; a natural scientist, for instance, would likely collect naturalia, such as plants. The contents of these smaller collections were more ephemeral for they were more often victims of dispersion than the large princely collections. Many objects from the Persian world now present in Vienna's museums were part of these early private collections. By the 19th century some of them were integrated into the imperial collections. Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856), for instance, the famous Orientalist and historian who was also the first president of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, collected Arabic, Ottoman and Persian manuscripts that were integrated into the Hofbibliothek, today's National Library.

Following the rise of museums as public institutions in Vienna during the second half of the 19th century, private collectors were able to donate or sell their collections to these institutions and thus save them for posterity under their own name. For example, Kanonikus Franz Bock's (1823-1899) textile collection that included a considerable

number of mediaeval Persian textiles was sold to the Museum of Art and Industry.

Bock collected his vast textile collections largely by obtaining samples from church treasuries. Many museums had correspondents—often imperial diplomats, stationed all over the world—who provided information and occasionally also objects for the collections. The director of the Orientmuseum, Arthur von Scala (1845-1909), travelled to Istanbul and beyond for museum acquisitions.

The Museum of Ethnography and particularly the Museum für Kunst und Industrie house objects that were collected within the respective regions by gentlemen travellers, traders, amateur researchers, professionals, and also by museum curators.

Collecting objects from the Islamic world continued under imperial patronage as well. The emperor sought to create great museums and some archdukes were important patrons and protectors of museums. Archduke Rainer (1783-1853) presented the famous Egyptian papyrus collection to Emperor Franz Joseph I (ruled 1848-1916), who in turn donated it to the Hofbibliothek.

The same archduke was a major patron of the Museum für Kunst und Industrie and yet another archduke, Carl Ludwig (1833-1896), was the benefactor of the Orientmuseum (founded 1875). Both Crown Princes Rudolf (1858-



Museum für Kunst und Industrie

1889) and Franz Ferdinand (1863-1914) published reports on their respective trips to the Islamic world and beyond, the latter returning in 1894 with a considerable collection of naturalia and artificialia that were exhibited in the Belvedere and later largely integrated into the Naturhistorische Museum. With the objects he brought back, Crown Prince Rudolf created a private "oriental" room, consisting primarily of Ottoman objects—the remains of which are today exhibited in the Hofmobiliendepot (Furniture Museum). Important imperial and aristocratic donations augmented the re-

spective collections of the Museum für Kunst und Industrie (Museum of Art and Industry) and the Orientalische Museum (Oriental Museum)

In addition to that, the older objects continued to be recycled and used in the imperial household. According to Alois Riegl (1858-1905), partly worn-out kilims were used as saddlecloths and the valuable classical knotted carpets, today part of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst (Museum of Applied Arts), were housed in special storerooms in Schönbrunn castle, indicating that they were still held in high esteem.