

Mina-kari, brilliant art of fire, earth and furnaces



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Enamel-working (*mina-kari* in Persian) is the art of painting and decorating metals like gold, silver, and copper (as well as glass and ceramics, known as vitreous enamel or porcelain enamel) with opaque or transparent colorful materials. It can be seen as an experimental and intricate art form involving complex interactions. The final product is a decorated object that, when heated, fuses metal oxides and salts, earning it the title of a brilliant art of fire, earth, and furnaces. Primarily practiced on copper,

enamel-work can also be done on gold and silver objects. Gold, unlike other metals, does not oxidize when the enamel is melted, allowing for detailed and precise patterns. In contrast, copper and silver enamels may not achieve the same level of quality. Enamel colors are typically divided into three groups: herbal colors, mineral colors, and metal colors.

The exact origins of enamel in Iran are difficult to determine, but some suggest a history dating back approximately 5,000 years. During excavations in Nahavand, Hamedan Province, experts unearthed a

pair of gold earrings that showcased a goldsmithing style dating back to the 7th to 8th centuries BCE, featuring enamel glass glaze on metal. Enamelled gold bracelets from the Achaemenid period in Iran are also notable artifacts. These bracelets are currently housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

Another Persian example of this art is a bronze bowl displayed at the Los Angeles Museum of Art, dating back to 550 to 330 BCE. The bronze bowl boasts a 15-centimeter diameter and a 3.2-centimeter depth.

"In Armenia, experts discovered Sassanid plates, which are among the exceptional examples of this art form. These plates are currently housed in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Other noble Sassanid mina-kari pieces can be found in the Armitage Museum in St. Petersburg, as well as in museums across England and France.

The narratives highlight the Seljuks' era as the pinnacle of Persian mina-kari art. It was a time when the production of brass and enamel dishes became widespread, attracting

numerous enthusiasts. The art gained such popularity that it crossed borders and found its way to neighboring countries. The "Alb Arsalan Tray" stands out as a valuable mina-kari piece from this period, enamelled on silver. This tray is currently exhibited at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and is attributed to Hassan Al-Kashani, a distinguished master of this craft. His name is elegantly engraved in the Kufic script on the dish.

In the Safavid period, miniature designs depicting banquets at the court, hunting, and horseback riding gained

popularity. Mina-kari on silver also became a sought-after art form. Islamic and Khatai motifs held a significant position in Iranian art during this era. Moreover, red emerged as the dominant color of choice during this period.

Today, Isfahan stands as a major hub for creating enameled objects in Iran. Skilled craftsmen in the city produce enamels in the painting enamel style, continuing the tradition of this intricate and vibrant art form. Some researches indicate that this art form originated in Iran before spreading to various regions worldwide.

Explore the timeless charm and rich heritage of Hamadan Bazaar

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The city of Hamadan, the capital of Hamedan Province, is situated near the Alvand Mountain, experiencing a cold, mountainous climate characterized by snowy winters and short, mild summers. Historical records from a respected Greek historian indicate that this region was referred to as Ekbatan and Hegmataneh in the past.

The historical Hamedan Bazaar stands as a testament to Iran's rich heritage, boasting remarkable architectural features at the heart of Hamedan city. A stroll through this an-

cient marketplace is a journey through time, with most structures hailing from the illustrious Qajar era, characterized by vaulted ceilings and enduring Islamic design elements.

Beyond its architectural allure, the Hamedan Bazaar's charm is further enhanced by its labyrinthine alleys and partially preserved caravanserais. Historically, Hamedan's strategic position as a crossroads for trade and pilgrimage routes to Iraq gave rise to a network of alleys and caravanserais within the city. Presently, Hamedan is home to 22 active and semi-active caravanserais such as Golshan, Mirza Kazem,

Rouhani, and Sharifiyeh.

These caravanserais, each with its distinct offerings, once served as vibrant hubs of commerce, fostering competition and choice among traders. The preservation of these historical gems not only links communities to their past but also underscores the importance of safeguarding these invaluable relics for future generations. Throughout history, the preservation of architectural marvels has not only piqued interest but also yielded substantial economic benefits. In this context, Hamedan, with its wealth of historical structures, stands poised to leverage its heritage

as a means of economic growth while ensuring meticulous preservation to showcase the city's cultural richness.

The traditional bazaar of Hamedan spans approximately 30 hectares and is built in the Qajar architectural style. It consists of 36 sections, alleys, and 26 caravanserais. The traditional bazaar of Hamedan, spanning approximately 30 hectares and constructed in the Qajar architectural style, comprises 36 sections, alleys, and 26 caravanserais. These caravanserais, once bustling centers with numerous rooms and shops, played a pivotal role in facilitating trade and

accommodation for travelers and merchants. Notably, efforts are underway to restore and maintain key caravanserais like Mirza Kazem and Golshan, recognizing their significance for both locals and tourists.

Despite the gradual decline in the importance of several historical buildings over time, efforts are being made to revitalize these cultural treasures. The Sharifiyeh Caravanserai, nestled among the ancient alleys of Hamedan, exudes a sense of vibrancy. Its layout, featuring wooden columns, arches, and vaults, presents an opportunity to establish a

market showcasing Hamedan's artisanal crafts, thereby transforming it into a cultural hub for visitors and residents alike.

In the past, Hamadan was often referred to as Iran's warehouse by merchants due to its strategic location. The city is also renowned for its expertise in tanning animal skins and crafting leather goods. Besides the Hamadan Bazaar, visitors can explore other captivating sites nearby such as the Alavian Dome, Hegmataneh Hill - a symbol of Hamadan's history, St. Stephanos Gregorian Church, as well as the tombs of Avicenna and Baba Taher.



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