

# Restoring Kerman's jewelry, cultural heritage



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## Iranica Desk

In the less visible layers of contemporary history and Iran's artistic traditions, there are narratives that not only speak of the cultural identity of a land's people but also reveal the forgotten path of progress, creativity, and imperial grandeur.

This narrative is a journey into the depths of goldsmithing art and industry in Kerman; a place where the combination of precious stones with precious metals was not merely for beauty, but also an eloquent expression of the knowledge, taste, and spirit of its people.

This story is not just a simple recounting; it is an invitation to reconsider our view of the past and to honor the knowledge that can help us build a more rooted and meaningful future.

In 2013, the historic Qeyssariyeh Bazaar of Kerman was on the verge of demolition. Many merchants were ready to leave, and even the preparations for selling and transferring

the lands had been made. Hussein Vadi'ati, founder of the Silver and Gold Museum Bathhouse of Kerman, said that at that time, an idea came to my mind: instead of leaving the bazaar, we should revive and restore it. I didn't want this historical asset to be lost. "With the follow-ups I had and the understanding and agreement between me, the Cultural Heritage Organization, and the Endowments Office, we started a project that lasted three years."

All wiring, plumbing, electrical, and telephone cables were moved underground. Shop signs were unified and coordinated. The appearance of the bazaar was not only preserved but made more beautiful and stronger than before.

"After completing the restoration of the bazaar, I thought to myself: I could kill two birds with one stone — both revive the historic bathhouse and restore the industry that was in danger of being forgotten in Kerman."

He noted, "Based on my personal interest in jew-

elry art, which I inherited from my family and had collected objects over the years, I decided to turn the bathhouse into a jewelry, silver, and gold museum; the first and only museum of its kind in the country, showcasing jewelry and artworks by artists."

Vadi'ati added that in this museum, about one and a half kilograms of gold and 7,000 mithqal of silver are displayed — all crafted by artisans from Kerman. Many of these pieces are over 100 years old.

The jewelry industry in Kerman was severely damaged during the Qajar era. After Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar's attack, the city was nearly destroyed. If some monuments like the Ganjali Khan Complex remain, it is thanks to the restorations carried out during the time of Ebrahim Khan Zahir al-Dawleh; the then governor of Kerman, a man who, out of genuine concern (his mother was from Kerman), returned and helped rebuild the city by constructing urban elements such as the bazaar, bathhouse, water reservoir, school, clock tower, and windcatcher.

He even re-invited prom-

inent artisans who had left Kerman to return and work. Unfortunately, due to the difficult conditions of that period, many of these craftsmen did not pass on their knowledge to the next generation, and the craft began to fade.

"My aim in establishing this museum was both to reintroduce this industry and to pay homage to a legacy that was on the brink of extinction."

Vadi'ati continued, "In this museum, in addition to about one and a half kilograms of gold and 7,000 mithqals of silver, nearly four display cases of jewelry-making tools are also exhibited. Some of these tools belonged to myself, and I collected them over the years, but a significant part of them was graciously donated to the museum by some families of Kerman."

"Throughout the museum's activity, fortunately, we succeeded in acquiring some rare artifacts, and of course, there were also individuals who, without expecting anything in return, entrusted us with their valuable works. Perhaps the names of some of them have been overlooked, but we strive to record and

keep alive the names of all benefactors who contributed to reviving this industry."

Another important point is that Kerman has historically been located along the Silk Road and the Spice Route; routes through which major merchants from India and Arab countries passed. This cultural and commercial crossroads led Kerman's artisans to develop jewelry art in a unique way, by combining precious stones and pearls.

As seen in the museum's artifacts, gold is combined with Indian stones, rubies, and Bahraini pearls. This fusion style is one of the distinctive features of Kerman's jewelry art, which, thanks to continuous collaboration and pursuit, we have managed to register these works and even their production process as part of the national heritage.

This national registration is not only an honor for Kerman but also an important step toward reviving the cultural and artistic identity of this ancient region.

Vadi'ati, in explaining the process of registering Kerman's jewelry arti-

facts, said, "The reality is that Kerman's jewelry art still has a long way to go to reach its true position at the national level. For comparison, Yazd has registered nearly 100 jewelry works to date, but in Kerman, only four pieces have been successfully registered. This is despite many of these arts having roots in Kerman. Unfortunately, we face serious weaknesses in documentation and introduction. Our goal is to change this situation and revive Kerman's artistic identity."

Vadi'ati emphasized the important role of the private sector in continuing this path and continued, "With the cooperation of the Kerman Gold and Jewelry Union and the support of some groups, we managed to maintain and keep the museum and exhibition active. Despite the heavy costs, these supports allowed us to continue the journey. This is not just a cultural project; it has two important outcomes: one, strengthening Kerman's tourism industry, and the second, prov-

ing the artistic and industrial capacities of Kerman's goldsmiths. When we can showcase artifacts with 200 years of authenticity along with their manufacturing tools, it means that Kerman not only has a rich past but can also build its future based on this heritage."

He further mentioned the valuable findings of ancient Iranian civilizations, especially in Kerman, noting, "Kerman's civilization dates back more than 7,000 years. In 'Shahr-e Sukhteh' (Burnt City), a 5,000-year-old pot has been found with a painted or moving image on it."

Finally, Vadi'ati emphasized, "My goal is not just to display a few historical objects. The aim is that when today's generation sees a 200-year-old necklace or a 300-year-old makeup chair, they shouldn't wonder, 'Did we have such things?' Instead, they should proudly say, 'This was made by our ancestors. This is part of our heritage.' Returning to identity is only possible through understanding our history."

