

IRANIAN HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS IN THE STATE MUSEUM OF ARTS AND THEIR ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF UZBEKISTAN'S TOURISM POTENTIAL

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: 07th June 2026

Accepted: 09th June 2026

Online: 11th June 2026

KEYWORDS

Taq-e Bostan, Apadana, Persepolis Terrace, beshmet, burgundy color.

ABSTRACT

This article examines collections related to Iranian history preserved in the State Museum of Arts of Uzbekistan, including works of contemporary Iranian art, porcelain artifacts, Persian carpets, miniature paintings, photographic artworks, calligraphy, manuscripts, and other cultural objects. Special attention is given to the history and culture of Iranian art, as well as to the artistic techniques and methods used in the creation of these artifacts. This determines the relevance of the chosen topic. The relevance of this topic is further emphasized by the growing interest of foreign tourists in the museum's Iranian collections.

This article focuses on one of the relatively underexplored topics in Uzbek art history: the study of manuscripts, artworks by renowned artists, and examples of decorative and applied arts related to Iranian history preserved in the State Museum of Arts of Uzbekistan. Artifacts related to Iranian art and history are also preserved in major museums around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the United States and the Louvre Museum in France, where cuneiform tablets and ancient Persian gold objects are displayed. Likewise, the State Museum of Arts of Uzbekistan possesses a rich collection of Iranian artistic and historical artifacts. These exhibits, alongside other rare museum treasures, continue to attract both international visitors and local audiences.

There is no doubt that every year many tourists visit art museums to see their exhibits. Foreign tourists are especially interested in Oriental art and the masterpieces of famous Russian artists displayed at the Uzbekistan State Museum of Arts.

Speaking about modern Iranian art, significant cultural reforms took place after the establishment of a new political regime in 1921. The number of modern schools increased considerably, and subjects such as the study of classical poets, calligraphy, drawing, handicrafts, and music were incorporated into primary and secondary school curricula. Since 1910, institutions teaching painting, sculpture, and other forms of art have been active in Iran. In 1918, schools of arts and crafts, including painting schools, were established. These institutions consisted of six departments and trained specialists in wood and metal craftsmanship. In 1930, the Iranian government adopted legislation regulating archaeological excavations and provided support for foreign archaeological expeditions studying Iran's

ancient cultural heritage. Measures were also taken to protect and partially restore architectural monuments. Shortly thereafter, a museum was established in Tehran. The newly founded University of Tehran created a Department of Iranian Archaeology and Art, which facilitated independent research and supported the work of foreign expeditions.¹

At the same time, local commissions were established to promote carpet weaving, while efforts were made to incorporate traditional Iranian architectural styles into the construction of public and private buildings. Iran's geographical location on a mountainous plateau contributed to its cultural distinctiveness and preservation of long-standing traditions. These traditions, originating as early as the Achaemenid period, continued to be revived despite strong foreign influences. Ancient Iranian artistic monuments survived relatively well because many were not destroyed during the Islamic period. This helped preserve ancient artistic traditions.

Scholars have presented evidence demonstrating the revival of ancient compositions and the continued influence of Achaemenid and Sasanian motifs in later artistic works. Particularly noteworthy is the close parallel between the rock reliefs of Taq-e Bostan² from the Sasanian period and manuscript decorations preserved in the British Museum dating to 1396. Both feature winged figures in remarkably similar compositions. This resemblance appears intentional, as even decorative motifs uncommon for the later manuscript period were reproduced. In 1931, an expedition from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, led by Professor Ernst Herzfeld, began archaeological investigations at Persepolis. Construction inscriptions discovered during excavations revealed that a palace on the southwestern part of the Persepolis Terrace³ belonged not to Darius II, as previously thought, but to Xerxes. Xerxes initiated the construction of the Hall of One Hundred Columns, while its walls were completed during the reign of Artaxerxes I. The excavations uncovered a small courtyard with a monumental staircase decorated with impressive sculptures.⁴

On the northern side of the palace, a double staircase led to a larger courtyard connected to the western side of the Apadana⁵. The discovery of two stone boxes containing gold and silver foundation tablets confirmed that the Apadana had been built by Darius. In a chamber located in the northeastern section of the terrace, an archive of more than 30,000 cuneiform tablets was discovered and is still being studied today. The expedition also began investigations into the ancient drainage system. Further archaeological work was carried out in areas surrounding Persepolis. Among the discoveries was a post-Alexandrian temple, along with evidence of some of the earliest settlements in the region, ancient ceramics, and stone tools. The tombs of Achaemenid kings were also examined. One of the most remarkable Iranian artifacts preserved in the museum is a traditional pile carpet.⁶

The carpet is woven in a vertical composition, with a cotton foundation and high-quality wool pile. Its design illustrates a scene from the famous epic *Shahnameh* by the Persian-Tajik

¹ To Iranian Art and Archaeology. Leningrad, 1935.

² Taq-e Bostan—this exhibit is situated near Kirmanshax town in the Iran

³ "Persepolis Terrace - an elevated terrace area in the city of Persepolis.

⁴ Iranian Art and Archaeology. Leningrad, 1935, p. 229.

⁵ **Apadana**— This structure was built in the ancient city of Persepolis, which was one of the capitals of the Achaemenid Empire. It is famous for its wall reliefs depicting delegations from various peoples and nations of the empire.

⁶ Iranian Art and Archaeology. Leningrad, 1935, pp. 148–149

poet Abulqasim Ferdowsi. At the center of the composition sits Bahram Gur, the legendary ruler of the Sasanian period. Two standing women are depicted on either side of him.

Bahram Gur is dressed in a traditional beshmet⁷ and wears a characteristic headdress. The women are portrayed in coordinated attire consisting of burgundy⁸ skirts decorated with blue and white circles, blue trousers, and gray blouses. Above Bahram Gur's shoulder appears an ornamental inscription in Arabic script. The lower section of the carpet depicts a festive court scene featuring two musicians playing a tambourine and a bowed string instrument, accompanied by a dancing performer. Fruits and vessels symbolizing hospitality and prosperity are arranged before them, including pomegranates, decorated jugs, pears, and apples.

The main composition is framed by a three-tiered border decorated with traditional Islamic vegetal motifs known as *islimi*. The upper and lower edges are embellished with burgundy silk borders and elegant tassels. This carpet is not merely a decorative object but also a vivid example of Eastern literature, court culture, and traditional carpet weaving. Themes of heroism, beauty, music, and celebration are harmoniously combined, introducing viewers to the rich cultural heritage of the ancient East.

Another valuable artifact preserved in the Museum's Department of Oriental Art is a miniature painting known as "**Court Miniature**" (*Dastgoh Miniature*). This work represents a fine example of traditional miniature art. It depicts a ruler or king in a solemn and majestic pose. He is dressed in luxurious garments richly decorated with intricate patterns and ornaments that clearly emphasize his high status and authority. A precious crown adorns his head, symbolizing sovereignty and political power.

The ruler occupies the center of the composition and appears confident and powerful. With both hands, he restrains two lions positioned on either side of him. The lions face opposite directions with their teeth exposed, creating a dramatic visual effect. This scene symbolizes the ruler's courage, strength, and control over the forces of nature. In Eastern artistic traditions, lions are often associated with power, bravery, and authority; thus, the king's mastery over them serves as a metaphor for his supreme rule.

The overall composition is highly dynamic. The ruler stands at the center, flanked by the fierce lions, creating a striking contrast that enhances the dramatic character of the scene. The event appears to take place outdoors, as two trees are depicted in the background. These natural elements add vitality to the composition and symbolize harmony between humanity and nature. In general, the miniature can be interpreted as an artistic representation of royal power, justice, and dominion over natural forces. Symbolic meanings and decorative visual elements occupy a central place in the work. The miniature measures 26 cm in height and 43 cm in width.

Another noteworthy work from the Museum's Oriental Art Department is the miniature entitled "**Funeral Ceremony Scene.**" This painting depicts a ceremonial gathering. On the right side of the composition, two women—one young and the other elderly—are seated on a raised platform. The younger woman holds a flower in her hand, indicating her

⁷ Beshmet-special clothes which is worn by folk Turkian and folk of Kavkaz

⁸ Burgundy- deep red-purple color

participation in a festive or ceremonial event. In front of the women stands a small child carrying a lantern.

The lantern illuminates the path and introduces movement and liveliness into the scene. Another important figure in the composition is a horseman leading a horse. He is holding the reins of the young woman's horse while facing her, suggesting communication or attentive interaction between the two figures. In the background, a modest rural dwelling or hut is depicted, indicating that the event takes place in a village setting. The overall content of the work reflects aspects of traditional life, customs, and ceremonial practices. Through these figures, the artist sought to portray human relationships, everyday experiences, and a festive atmosphere. The miniature measures 25 cm in height and 37 cm in width.

Another example of easel miniature painting in the collection is entitled **"Easel Miniature."** The composition portrays a noble warrior-like figure resting beside a road. Although reminiscent of a samurai in appearance, the figure is depicted according to the artistic conventions of Persian miniature painting. He wears luxurious clothing and armor, emphasizing his elevated social status. Several objects are arranged around him, including a sword, a parasol, a fan, and other personal belongings.

These details contribute to the calm yet somewhat mysterious atmosphere of the scene. Overall, the artwork appears to represent a traveling warrior taking a moment of rest during a journey, while simultaneously suggesting the complexities and challenges of his life. The dimensions of the work are 31.5 cm in height and 26 cm in width.

The Iranian artifacts preserved in the State Museum of Arts of Uzbekistan continue to attract the attention of both international tourists and local visitors. Alongside masterpieces by renowned artists such as Ivan Aivazovsky and Ilya Repin, as well as Buddhist sculptures and other valuable exhibits, these works form an important part of the museum's cultural heritage collections.

Conclusion

The study of nineteenth-century Iranian applied art and other Iranian artifacts preserved in the Oriental Art Department of the State Museum of Arts of Uzbekistan deserves broader scholarly attention and public promotion. Through the examination of these collections, it becomes possible to gain a deeper understanding of ancient Iranian settlements, the historical development of Iranian art, and the evolution of both applied and fine arts within Iranian culture.

Furthermore, the museum's Oriental collections provide valuable insights into the symbolic meanings embedded in Iranian carpets and miniature paintings. In particular, the imagery found in the carpets reflects important aspects of Iranian history, including the reigns of notable rulers and the cultural values associated with their periods.

These artistic representations demonstrate the high level of development achieved by Iranian art throughout history. There is little doubt that these artifacts, like many other unique exhibits housed in the museum, illustrate the richness of Uzbekistan's cultural heritage.

At the same time, they contribute to the growth of cultural tourism by attracting increasing numbers of foreign visitors to Uzbekistan. Consequently, the preservation, study, and promotion of these collections remain important tasks for museum professionals, researchers, and cultural institutions. The Iranian collections preserved in the State Museum

of Arts of Uzbekistan not only serve as valuable historical and artistic sources but also function as a bridge connecting the cultural heritage of Central Asia and Iran. Through exhibitions, academic research, and educational activities, these artifacts continue to foster intercultural dialogue and enhance appreciation of the shared cultural traditions of the region.

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