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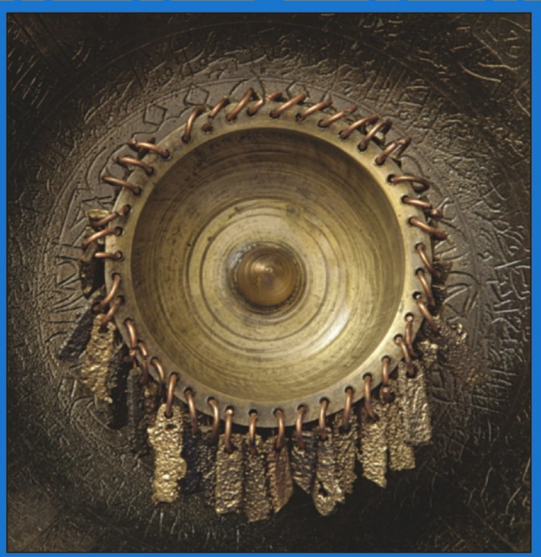


AZERBAIJAN

Copper Works



HEYDAR ALIYEV FOUNDATION







Coppersmith Art in Azerbaijan

Popular arts have deeply-rooted background and traditions in Azerbaijan. The age of metal works excavated in places like Nakhchivan, Mingechevir, Gazakh, Ganja, etc. is about 5,000 years. Utensils, arms and jewellery found there not only provide a valuable historic evidence, but also testify to a high level of craftsmanship in the area. Since copper was discovered in the territory of Azerbaijan in Eneolithic period, metal started playing an important role in economic, social, cultural and day-to-day lives of primitive human societies from that time onwards. Discovery of new types of metals like lead, tin, manganese launched the Bronze Age in Azerbaijan's history.

The archaeological finds excavated in the territory of Azerbaijan clearly indicate that back in the 2nd millennium B.C. our ancestors were capable of making elaborate works of bronze, such as utensils, daggers, hatchets, belts, elements of attire and other products widely used in day-to-day life.

Bronze works manufactured at that period, elaborate as they are, in most of the cases were still non-decorated. A double-headed bronze figure of a deer excavated in the vicinity of Dolanlar village in Garabagh is of a particular interest. Since in old times metal was mainly used to manufacture artworks for religious cult, it may be assumed that deer was one of the totems worshipped by local residents.

Belts constitute another type of ancient bronze artifacts featuring high level of craftsmanship and artistic taste. Zoomorphic images portrayed on belts from Garabagh, Gazakh, Gedabey and other sites are truly astounding.

Images featuring some of these metal artworks shed the light on that-time customs and traditions, religious beliefs and types of attire. Tin rings with seals found in Mingechevir and dating to the 8-7th centuries B.C. are particularly remarkable in this respect. The seals on the rings portray fighting scenes between a human and a lion, a warrior armed with spear and shield and a man worshipping fire. Finds like this are instrumental in studying lifestyle and traditions of their respecive periods.

The Middle Ages constitute one of the richest periods in the history of popular trades in Azerbaijan. Household utensils found in the course of archaeological excavations around Mingechevir, nowadays exhibited in the Azerbaijan History Museum, Baku, are of a particular interest among the finds related to this period. A silver plate of a very nice shape adorned with an elaborate ornament is standing out among the works from this collection.

Gold and silver belt particles, rings, bracelets and other elements of jewellery excavated in Mil Plain, Gabala, Mingechevir and Nakhchivan provide sufficient evidence of highly developed jeweller's art in the territory of Azerbaijan back in the early mediaeval period. The works discovered feature the most intricate jewellery techniques, such as filigree, impression, embossment, lettering, etc.

The 11-15th centuries were the period when the art of metal works thrived in Azerbaijan. Artefacts of that time include various types of firearms, diverse home appliances and other works, many of them preserved to this day. As it was the case in previous centuries, Ganja, Shamakhy, Nakhchivan and Tabriz were the major hubs for metal works' production. Archaeological excavations indicate increasing role of Baku as of the 12th century.

Manufactured metal products are of a particular interest among excavated works of art related to the period in question. Majority of them were found in the course of excavations conducted at the reserve area of the Shirvanshah Royal Palace in Baku's Icherisheher (the Inner City). A bronze barbeque roughly dating back to the 13-14th centuries found in the District of Guba is another interesting find related to the area of Shirvan. A semi-spheric barbeque 30 cm in height, 131 cm in girth and 41 cm in diameter features an extraordinary shape and elaborate ornamental decorations. According to the inscriptions carved upon, the barbeque was manufactured by coppersmith named Ahmad ibn Muhammad. Other towns of Azerbaijan, like Beylagan, Ganja, Nakhchivan and Tabriz were also among the major hubs of copper production at that period.

In the 14-15th centuries, Tabriz grew into the leading hub of metal works. Grandeur of the city featuring plethora of trades and crafts were reported by Venetian traveller Marco Polo during his trip to Azerbaijan in the second half of the 13th century. Artefacts manufactured in Tabriz during this period are nowadays cherished in a number of world's leading museums. E.g. an ornate bowl manufactured by Youssif bin Ahmad Tabrizi in 1319 is exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, whereas the State Hermitage in St.Petersburg brags of a bronze cauldron of the same period.

In the 16-17th centuries, places like Tabriz, Ardabil, Maragha, Nakchivan, Ganja, Shamakhy and Baku grew into the major clusters of houseware production. This was also the time when arms (daggers, swords, maces, shields, etc.) and chain armor pieces (hoods, chest armor, kneeguards, etc.) manufactured by the Azerbaijani artisans were particularly popular abroad where they were in high demand. References to the arms crafted in Shamakhy are far not infrequent in that-time Russian annals. E.g. description of 8 hoods (bashlyk) manufactured by artisans from Shamakhy and used by Boris Godunov, a Russian Throne contender, may be found in one of the narratives. Such a high popularity of local coppersmiths was far not by chance as they succeeded in introducing a number of cutting-edge novelties to conventional arms. In the 15th century, broad straight swords were gradually replaced by curved crescent-shaped sabres inlaid with gold, silver, ivory and gems. The same holds true with adornments used for shields and chain armor.

In general, embellishments made of precious metals are divided into 4 groups depending on the way they were used, i.e. adorments for neck, hand and wrist jewelry, headware and attire decorations.

Coppersmith craft was among the most developed trades in Azerbaijan throughout the 18th century. Foreign travellers visiting Tabriz, Ganja, Sheki and Baku reported of special neighborhoods producing elaborate and extraordinary copper tableware. At that particular time, there were places in Azerbaijan where coppersmith business was the major occupation of not just a street or a neighborhood, but the majority of the population. Lahyj, a town within the Khanate (Duchy) of Shamakhy, was one of the residential areas of this type. Lahyj was the hub for mass production of all sorts of household utensils, such as dolcha (can), satyl (copper bucket), aftafa (ablution jug), majmayi (copper tray), sarnij, sarpush, etc. By their quality and quantity, copper works manufactured in Lahyj were far not inferior to the ones crafted in large urban areas of the day.

Along with coppersmiths, works by Azerbaijani enamelers were famous in faraway places as they featured clear and undisturbed colors. Since each color they used to fill in gaps had peculiarities of its own, the colors were separated from each other by threads made of gold or other metals. Diversity of colors in enamel works crafted in Azerbaijan, as well as their harmonious combination are truly amazing.

In the 19-20th centuries, the three major types of metal trades mostly prevalent in Azerbaijan included blacksmith, coppersmith and goldsmith works. Blacksmiths were mainly engaged in manufacturing agricultural and household tools, such as barbeques, trivets, door knobs, tongs, etc.

With a very rich history and deeply-rooted traditions, coppersmith art of Azerbaijan keeps playing an important role among the country's metal trades to this day. Depending on lifestyle and occupation of local residents, traditional household utensils like qazan (pot), tava (frying pan), sini (tray), satyl (indented bucket), aftafa

(ablution jug), sahang (pitcher), dolcha (can), etc. are still in high demand in day-to-day life. Compared to other types of metal trades, goldsmith works were still mainly based on yesteryear techniques. Old types of jewellery popular among women, such as rings, earrings, bracelets, necklaces were not outfashioned in later periods, so enameled earrings from Baku and Shamakhy, filigree necklaces and golden hairpins with gems from Ganja and Sheki or mirror-adorned belts from Shusha are still looking fabulous.

The Gala Antiques Museum was inaugurated in Gala Settlement in September 2011. Constructed under the auspices of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, the Museum exhibits 800 artifacts. Decorative and applied artworks created by the Azerbaijani people throughout centuries are displayed on the first and second floors of the 3-stored building, while the third floor demonstrates exhibits manufactured in the US, Germany, Austria, Russia, England, Belgium, Iran, Uzbekistan, Poland, Turkey and other places collected in Azerbaijan's countryside areas.







GAZAN (CAULDRON)

Gazan is a traditional household utensil used for cooking meals. Depending on size and use, there were so-called wedding gazans, funeral gazans, day-to-day gazans, etc. Some gazans feature patterns, lines, names of owners, as well as good wishes.

Azerbaijan, copper, 19th century

Dimensions: 75x128x140mm (smaller gazan)

110x185x245mm (bigger gazan)



TAVASAR (FRYING PAN)
Tavasar is a round copper pan with a long handle and flat edges,
distinct from the traditional long handle pan.
Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century
Dimensions: 230x60x280mm







SINI (TRAY)

Trays are usually shallow and have round shape and smooth edges. With the diameter up to 1 meter sini are mainly used to cover gazans (cauldrons) and to serve food. Some sini feature elaborate ornaments with famous sayings, names of prophets, verses and expressions of good wishes.

Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century

Dimensions: 590x15mm



SINI (TRAY)
Azerbaijan, copper, early 19th century
Dimensions: 590x15mm







SINI (TRAY)
Azerbaijan, copper, 19th century
Dimensions: 590x15mm





SUZGEJ (COLANDER)

Suzgej is used for rinsing or washing meals. A traditional colander featured a hemispheric shape dotted with numerous holes. Some colanders are adorned with patterns and inscriptions.

Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century

Dimensions: 240x150mm
220x150mm
200x150mm



KAFKIR (SCUMMER)

Kafkirs vary in size and feature punctured, flat or round head and long handle, adorned with patterns.
Used to remove scum while boiling meat, tasting and mixing food.
Azerbaijan, copper, 19th century
Dimensions: 290mm







CHOMCHE (LADLE)
As opposed to kafkirs (scummers), ladles feature long handles and heads
shaped after piala (water bowl). They were designed to serve meals from gazan (cauldron).
Ladles were also used for measurement.
Azerbaijan, copper, early 20th century
Dimensions: 760mm; 480mm; 375mm; 325mm



SATYL (INDENTED COPPER BUCKET)
Satyl is used to store and transport liquid meals and dairy products.
The surface is oftentimes adorned with elaborate patterns, ornaments,
bird and animal images, artisans' or customers'names, verses, sayings, etc.
Azerbaijan, copper, 1270 Hijrah (1854)
Owner: Muhammad
Inscription: Oh cupbearer, enjoy this Paradisal elixir!
Dimensions: 260x790mm



BAL CHELLEYI (HONEY PITCHER)
Azerbaijan, copper, 1887
Dimensions: 450x840mm



KASA (BOWL)

Kasa was used for scrambling eggs, storing foodstuffs, cooking flour meals and rice, meltng butter, storing yoghurt and milk. Widely applied while serving cold or hot meals.

Azerbaijan, copper, early 20th century

Dimensions: 110x205mm









SARPUSH

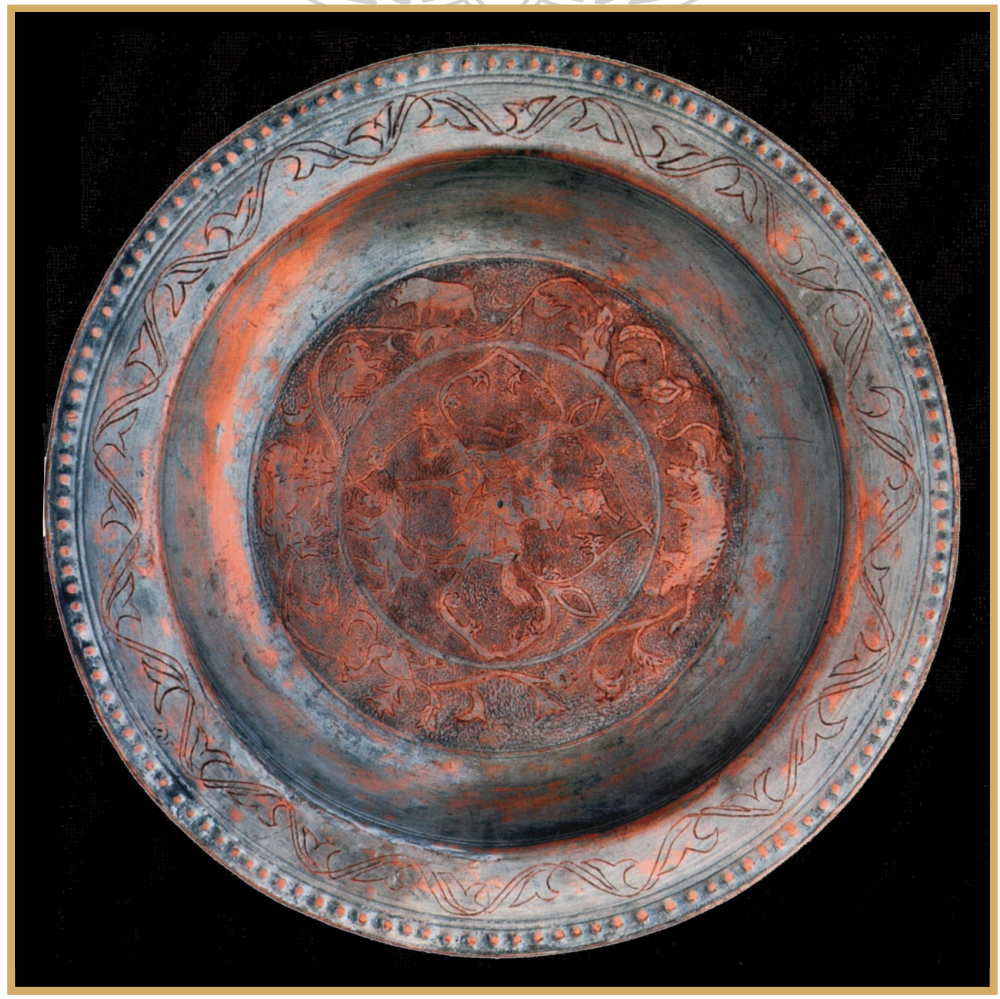
Sarpush is a traditional name for a cone-shaped cover used to keep pilaf warm and prevent the pot from dust.

Azerbaijan, copper, 1256 Hijrah (1840)

Owner: Saleh

Inscription: Oh Lord, He who endows this world with riches and saves it from misfortunes.

Dimensions: 290x240mm



NIMCHE (PLATE)

Nimche is a shallow dish varying in size with either plane or elaborately decorated surface.
Nimche with plane design were used to cover utensils, whereas the ornamented ones were crafted for serving ceremonial feasts, as well as delivering orders and mail.

Owner: Safarali

Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century

Dimensions: 240mm



NIMCHE (PLATE)
Azerbaijan, copper, 1272 Hijrah (1855)
Dimensions: 45x270mm



NIMCHE (PLATE)
Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century
Dimensions: 240mm



NIMCHE (PLATE)
Azerbaijan, copper, 1855
Dimensions: 150x40mm





SHERBETGABY (BOWL FOR SHERBET)
Bowl for sherbet (traditional soft drink in Azerbaijan) is a cup-shaped copper work decorated with fine patterns, human, animal and bird images.
Azerbaijan, copper, 1283 Hijrah (1866)
Inscription: Mohammad the Propher and the 12 Imams
Dimensions: 550x420mm





SEFER DESTI (TRAVEL SET)
Travel set consists of small size dishes, a little colander (suzgej),
a saltcellar, pepper and sumach pots and a folding scummer (sefer kefkiri) etc.
Azerbaijan, copper, 19th century
Inscription: Oh My Lord, leaving this world is my fate,
So let the mysteries get unveiled.
Hafiz Shirazi





DOLCHA (PITCHER)
Dolcha was used to serve refreshing drinks.
Azerbaijan, copper, 19th century
Dimensions: 210x410mm







SATYL (INDENTED BUCKET)

Azerbaijan, copper, early 19th century

Dimensions: 350x110mm



PARCH (MUG)
Parch is a type of mug oftentimes referred to as taygulp or birelli (single-handled cup). Used to serve limited amounts of water.
Azerbaijan, copper, early 19th century
Dimensions: 105x120mm





CHYRAQ (LAMP)

Chyraqs filled with animal fat or oil were used for domestic illumination and public liturgy.

Traditional lamps were manufactured of copper, ceramics or faience, adorned with vegetal and geometrical ornaments.

Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century

Dimensions: 650x195mm



CHYRAQ (LAMP)
Azerbaijan, copper, 1259 Hijrah (1843)
Owner: Qafar
Dimensions: 400x250mm





CHYRAQ (LAMP)

Azerbaijan, copper, early 19th century

Dimensions: 270x260mm

270x260mm

210x220mm



GYRKH ACHAR JAMY (BOWL OF FORTY DREAMS)

Bowl of forty dreams was crafted of brass by top class artisans in XIX following a special order by occultists. Prayers, symbols and incantations were engraved on the bowl's inner and outer sides with forty small keys to magic doors attached to the medallion in the middle.

Azerbaijan, brass, early 20th century

Inscripions: Quote verses from the Holy Qur'an

Dimensions: 200x60mm



HAMAM SANDYGHY (BATHHOUSE CHEST)

Bathhouse chests were used in traditional bathhouses (hamams) to store visitors' jewellery.

Azerbaijan, copper, 19th century

Dimensions: 280x370mm









BATHHOUSE CHEST
Azerbaijan, copper, 1313, Hijrah (1895)
Owner: Sarvinaz
Dimensions: 260x1180mm



BARYT GABY (POWDER-FLASK)
Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century
Dimensions: 170mm



TAGHALAG (THREAD SPOOL)
Along with traditional application as a tool for unwinding threads from cocoons taghalag could be also used for covering meals.
Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century
Dimensions: 125x185mm



TAGHALAG (THREAD SPOOL)
Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century
Dimensions: 480x375x325mm



SARNIJ

A traditional household utensil of varying capacity used for milking or making yoghurt.

Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century

Dimensions: 410x310x260mm



AFTAFA (ABLUTION JUG)

Aftafa is a traditional vessel used for various feasts and ceremonies.

Azerbaijan, copper, late 19th century

Dimensions: 350x430mm





AFTAFA (ABLUTION JUG)

Azerbaijan, copper, 1262 Hijrah (1845)

Inscription: Oh Lord, He who grants us the vital bread!

Dimensions: 420x240mm



GULABDAN (CARAFE)

Gulabdan is a decanter for rose extract (gulab), a sort of traditional perfume used at various feasts and ceremonies.

Azerbaijan, brass, early 20th century

Dimensions: 200mm





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DESIGN:
SS PRODUCTION, AZERBAIJAN

PRINT:
CHASHIOGLU, AZERBAIJAN

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ISBN: 978-9952-8144-5-3

Collection owner:
Shafag Gurbanova

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