



CROWN JEWELS OF PERSIA

CROWN JEWELS of Persia, the assemblage of jewels collected by the kings of Persia, kept now in the Bānk-e markazī-e Īrān (Central bank of Iran) in Tehran. Approximately fifty of the larger gems are engraved with the names and dates of particular rulers.

Although there are references to the dazzling wealth of the Sasanian monarchs when they were defeated by the Arabs in the mid-7th century, the most famed example being the jewel-encrusted palace carpet from Ctesiphon (see [bahār-e kesrā](#)), reliable sources on crown jewels exist only from the Safavid period (907-1148/1501-1736) and later. Shah ‘Abbās I (996-1038/1588-1629) amassed a vast collection of jewels as his country grew rich from the spoils of war, gifts, and the harvest from traveling jewelers and envoys whom he sent to search for the rarest specimens in India, Constantinople, and Venice.

The throne, imperial regalia, and jewels were emblems of power, intended to impress all who witnessed them, and they therefore traveled everywhere with the shah. One English visitor, George Mainwaring, described the throne as “of silver plate set with turkies (turquoises) and rubies very thick, and six great diamonds which did shew like stars . . .” (Ross, p. 209; cf. Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 8).

The role of Nāder Shah Afšār

Most of the seemingly limitless array of gems in the Persian national



collection, many of which lie unmounted in trays, were collected by Nāder Shah (1148-60/1736-47). As Nāder Ṭahmāsbqolī Afšār, a Turkman chieftain, he served the Safavid shah Ṭahmāsb II (1135-45/1722-32), helping to defend Persia against attacks by the Ottomans, Russians, and Afghans. In the process he amassed great riches, including the former Safavid crown jewels, which he recaptured from the Afghans. In 1148/1736, after driving many of the invading forces from Persian territory, he was proclaimed shah. The Armenian cleric Abraham of Crete, who witnessed his coronation, described his gold crown, set with “rare gems and huge pearls,” and his table service of various vessels and objects, “some gold, some silver, some inset with gems” (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 10-11). Nāder Shah continued to extend the boundaries of Persia. In 1152/1739 he defeated the Mughal emperor Nāṣer-al-Dīn Moḥammad (1131-61/1719-48) and captured Delhi, returning to Persia with a vast treasury of loot described by the French Abbé de Claustré: “. . . 5,000 chests were filled with gold rupees and 8,000 with silver rupees. There was also an inconceivable number of other chests filled with diamonds, pearls and other jewels The treasure which the King of Persia carried off from India can be estimated at . . . the equivalent of 5 billion, 400 millions of our silver” (p. 247; cf. Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 11). In 1744 the Englishman Jonas Hanway wrote of four complete sets of horse furnishings, “one mounted with pearls, another with rubies, a third with emeralds, and the last with diamonds . . .” (pp. 254-55; cf. Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 11).

Nāder Shah’s utilitarian buckler and sword were later totally covered in gems. They were among the most important emblems of Persian royalty and were carried with the regalia by his successors. The adornments of the buckler include a ruby-red octagonal spinel of 225 karats (< Ar. *qīrāṭ* < Gk. *keration* “carob bean,” a weight equivalent to 4 grains)—among the largest in the world—and emeralds of 140, 95, and 90 karats respectively, as well as diamonds. There are also more than 750 diamonds on the scabbard of his saber (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 58-61).

Nāder Shah was assassinated in 1160/1747, and Persia was plunged into civil war; his grandson Šāhroḡ, though blinded, eventually emerged as shah, reigning in name, if not in fact, at Mašhad for nearly fifty years (1161-1210/1748-95). The Zand dynasty (1163-1209/1750-94) held power in Shiraz as *wakīls*, or regents, on behalf of the Safavid puppet Esmā’īl III (1163-66/1750-53) and his successors; they were in conflict with one of Nāder Shah’s Afghan generals, [Āzād Khan](#), in Azarbaijan and especially with the



Qajar chieftain Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan in the Caspian region. The brilliant though cruel Qajar eunuch [Āḡā Moḥammad Khan](#) finally triumphed and founded the Qajar dynasty in 1211/1796. He had already secured the portion of the crown jewels that had been held by the Zands and had tortured Šāhroḡ to death in order to obtain the remainder of Nāder Shah's gems. In 1206/1791, in order to raise money for his military campaigns, the last Zand ruler, Loṭf-'Alī Khan (1203-09/1789-94), had tried to sell the crown jewels to the British; Sir Harford Jones Brydges has left an account of the negotiations (pp. cxxiv ff.; cf. Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 12), a primary source on the crown jewels at that time.

A decanter in the collection provides a unique example of Zand enameling on gold (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 106-07).

The crown jewels of the Qajars

Āḡā Moḥammad Khan was murdered on a campaign in 1212/1797; he was succeeded by his nephew Fath-Ā-'Alī Shah (1212-50/1797-1834), though only after he had put down three rebellions and regained the crown jewels, which had been stolen once again. His peaceful reign has been recorded in a great many portraits and descriptions of his court (see [courts and courtiers vii](#)), which provide a vivid picture of his wealth in gems.

The Nāder throne. Of three thrones now preserved in Tehran the "Nāder throne," a chair, was used in the coronation of Moḥammad-Reżā Shah in 1346 Š./1967; the other two, in the Golestān palace, are ornately decorated platforms on which the shahs knelt or sat. The wooden framework of the Nāder throne can be dismantled into twelve sections. Just above the seat is a series of plaques with gold inscriptions ascribing the piece to Fath-'Alī Shah; the ruby-red translucent enamel ground of the plaques is typical of his period. The pieces of the throne were probably reassembled later in the 19th century, however. The throne is overlaid with enameled gold and encrusted with gems; centered on the back is a 225-karat, blue-green emerald with some "jardin," a mossy-looking inclusion often seen in emeralds. Surrounding this central gem are four step-cut emeralds, including two particularly magnificent specimens of 170 and 130 karats respectively, and between these emeralds are four smaller ones ranging from 40 to 70 karats; an additional twelve emeralds range between 35 and 90 karats. All the major stones on the panel below the seat are emeralds, the central one weighing 55 karats (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 54-56).



The difference between true rubies and other red stones known as balas rubies or spinels seems to have been recognized from an early date, but not until 1783 were the ruby and spinel distinguished chemically (Romé de l'Isle; cf. Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 32). The finest rubies come from the Mogok mines in Burma and spinels primarily from Badakṣān in Afghanistan. Of some forty spinels on the throne four are oval cabochons surrounding the central emerald on the back; one of them, a deep red stone of fine quality weighs 65 karats, and others of various cuts and shapes range between 24 and 44 karats. Among a profusion of rubies those set in the back range between 20 and 25 karats, whereas at the center of the top finial there is a purplish-red irregular cabochon ruby of 15 karats.

Diamonds came from the renowned mines of Golconda in southern India. The countless diamonds on the throne are all relatively small, though one outstanding specimen in the center of a diamond-petaled floret below the finial gives off so much fire that it is difficult to measure.

The Kayānī crown. The great Kayānī crown (see [crown v](#); plate xxxiii), commissioned by Fath-ʿAlī Shah (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 72-73), can be identified in the portraits, most of them painted for the purpose of impressing the foreign monarchs to whom they were sent; the surviving crown in the royal treasury may, however, have been only one of several, for the details differ in various portraits. It is essentially in four parts, held together by thread and cord: the headband, a central band paved with pearls, a mitered upper headband, and a crimson velvet cap. It is encrusted with thousands of diamonds, pearls, emeralds, rubies, and red spinels, many of fine quality and large size; there are about 1,800 pearls of 10-20 grains, 1,200 of them in the paved section alone. Of about 300 emeralds eight cabochon drops ranging between 25 and 30 karats encircle the mitered top, and four pear-shaped cabochons set in gold are sewn onto the red velvet between four jeweled arches, which culminate in a magnificent ruby-red spinel finial, an irregular polished lump of 120 karats reputedly once part of the throne of the Mughal emperor Awrangzīb (1068-1118/1658-1707). Of some 1,500 red stones the cabochon-cut and small faceted ones are rubies and the few dozen large faceted ones spinels; eleven of the latter, including the finial, are among the most important. Other spinels in the pearl pavement vary between 25 and 85 karats. The innumerable pearls probably came from the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Mannar separating India and Ceylon (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 34). The seven most important diamonds are the central 23-karat Golconda



diamond, of a clean, pale pink, irregularly rose-cut, and six others in the triangular areas projecting into the pearl pavement: colorless, pale-yellow, and yellow diamonds between 18 and 25 karats, variously in irregular Mughal, pear-shaped Mughal, irregular rose, and rectangular step cut and in polished crystal cleavage.

Jeqqas, or turban ornaments, were worn to support egret or other plumes, a court fashion among the Timurids of Central Asia and Khorasan in the 15th century (see, e.g., Grube and Sims, pp. 149 fig. 85, 176 fig. 104) and an insignia of royalty in Persia from the Safavid period onward. The two on the Kayānī crown are interchangeable and may have been added for the coronation of Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah in 1313/1896 (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 73). They contain the most important emeralds in the crown. The larger *jeqqa*, of Fath-‘Alī Shah’s period, consists of twenty-one curving spikes of emeralds springing from an enameled boss containing a 30-karat tablet emerald. The other, somewhat later *jeqqa*, in front of the first one, consists of eleven diamond plumes springing from a diamond clasp, a “tremblant,” at the center of which is a round, shallow 80-karat emerald. It is flanked by pendant emeralds, and there is a diamond tassel below.

Of many other *jeqqas* in the Persian royal collection two outstanding examples are the “Nāder Shah *jeqqa*,” 12.8 cm long, and the favorite *jeqqa* of Fath-‘Alī Shah. Probably actually assembled in the early 20th century, the Nāder Shah *jeqqa* is decorated with martial motifs backed with colored foils, which add delicate tints to the gems; it contains a magnificent deep blue-green 65-karat cabochon emerald, which, with its five pendant emeralds, all matched for color and quality, certainly came from the Chivor mines in Colombia, now extinct (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 78). The major gems in Fath-‘Alī Shah’s *jeqqa* are also of superb quality: two oval emeralds of 55 karats each; two red spinels of 65 and 60 karats respectively; two colorless double rose diamonds of 25 and 22 karats respectively; and a pale-yellow, rounded square diamond of 16 karats (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 79).

Regalia. Pierre-Amédée Jaubert (p. 206), Napoleon’s special emissary to Fath-‘Alī Shah in 1221/1806, described the great summer levee, at which pages carried the “attributes of supreme power”: the scepter, the sword, the dagger, the javelin, the buckler, and the ewer and basin (cf. Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 96). One of the oldest pieces in the regalia and one of the few with no emeralds is the scepter, set only with diamonds, rubies, and red spinels, some as large as 40 karats. The scabbard of the saber is set with rubies and spinels



on a solidly paved pearl ground. The dagger, ornamented with painted opaque and translucent enamels signed by Ġolām Bāqer, which date it to the period of Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Shah, is set with diamonds, cabochon emeralds, and red spinels, one of 60 karats and one of 35 karats, inscribed and dated to 1069/1659 (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 74-75, 86).

Armlets were part of the shah's formal attire, and Jaubert (p. 205) mentioned "two great circular bracelets"; "the diamond to which the Persians give the name Kouhi-Nour (mountain of light) was set in the middle of one of these bracelets; and that which they call Deryāi-Nour (ocean of light) embellished the other . . ." (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 15). One of the great historic stones in the world, certainly the most famous gem in Persia, is in fact the Daryā-ye Nūr, which Moẓaffar-al-Dīn Shah wore on his hat in England in 1902; it was also worn by Reżā Shah and Moḥammad-Reżā Shah Pahlavi at their respective coronations. The Daryā-ye Nūr was brought with the equally famous Kūh-e Nūr from India in 1152/1739, but after Nāder Shah's death the latter found its way back to India; it was offered to Queen Victoria after the Punjab wars and is now part of the British crown jewels. The belief that the Daryā-ye Nūr and the Nūr-al-ʿAyn (Light of the eye) were once part of the "great table diamond" seen for sale in Golconda in 1642 by the French jeweler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, appears to have been substantiated by the research of V. B. Meen and A. D. Tushingham (1967; 1968, pp. 27-29); the Daryā-ye Nūr therefore has a recorded history of 325 years. It now weighs between 175 and 195 karats (Van Cleef & Arpels quoted 182) and is thought to have been cut in 1250/1834, the year of Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Shah's death, for one of the facets of the rectangular step-cut tablet bears the Persian inscription "al-Solṭān Sāḥeb-qerān Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Shah Qājār 1250." A flawless pink stone of extraordinary limpidity, it is surpassed by only five known diamonds: the Cullinan and the Kūh-e Nūr in the British crown jewels, the Orlov in the Kremlin in Moscow, and the Jubilee and the Neẓām, both privately owned.

Household items. A pair of solid-gold candlesticks, each weighing 5 kg and solidly encrusted with gems (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 108-09), probably dates from the time of Faṭḥ-ʿAlī Shah. The cover of a probably contemporary porcelain food dish contains, among other gems, red spinels, purplish-red Burmese rubies, and a superb 25-karat dark blue-green emerald (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 116).

Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's contribution. From the period of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96) there is a tiny box, its gold framework inset with rose-cut



diamonds and its surface paved with 92 emeralds, including a 35-karat octagonal blue-green stone at the center. Another beautiful small object, entirely of rubies, was probably the holder for a coffee cup; each stone is more or less rectangular, and the stones are graduated in size, forming flutes that alternate with vertical gold ribs (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 93).

Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah, who was assassinated in 1313/1896, inaugurated a museum of royal treasures, including the crown jewels, in the Golestān palace. A number of fine enamel pieces attest to a revival of the enameling technique during his reign. He was also the last ruler to add substantially to the collection, commissioning many pieces from technologically advanced Western gem cutters and adding yellow Cape diamonds from the newly discovered mines in South Africa; the largest examples are of 152, 135.45, and 120 karats respectively (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 32).

The buckle of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah's woven gold belt consists of a velvet-green 175-karat emerald in a diamond frame (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 52). The scabbard of a saber presented to him by the vizier [Amīn-al-Solṭān](#) in 1312/1894-95 reportedly contains about 3,000 gems, of which the quality and finish are for the most part superb; they include emeralds of 110 and 100 karats, two Kashmir blue sapphires of 75 and 30 karats respectively, a 55-karat rectangular spinel, a Burmese ruby, and many diamonds, including a diamond dedicatory inscription (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 84-85). He commissioned for himself a great globe standing 110 cm high, reportedly to safeguard some of his loose gems, which might otherwise be lost. Approximately 51,000 precious stones are set in more than 165 kg of pure gold, many very large even for this collection. Two of the three largest emeralds, of superb quality, weigh 175 karats each, and a cabochon weighs 125 karats. Spinel includes three raspberry-red examples of 200, 110, and 80 karats respectively. Rubies include oval cabochons of 75, 55, 50, and 45 karats and two dark-blue sapphires of 30 and 35 karats respectively; the diamonds are many (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 140-43).

The crown jewels of the Pahlavis

At the coronation of Moḥammad-Rezā Shah on 4 Ābān 1346 Š./26 October 1967 the Kayānī crown was borne on a cushion, while the shah himself wore the Pahlavi crown (plate xxxiv), commissioned by his father, Rezā Shah, for his own coronation in 1305 Š./1926 (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 50-51). The adoption of the dynastic name Pahlavī was expressly intended to underscore



the claim to a direct heritage from the Persian past. The four stepped panels around the crown recall the form of many Sasanian battlemented crowns (ii), and sunbursts refer to the rays emanating from the head of the god Mithra, as well as the heads of the Sasanian kings, on rock reliefs and other monuments. Fluttering ribbons were Sasanian symbols of kingly power, and the device forming the gold-and-diamond clasp of the white egret plume, repeated on the base of the crown, is probably also derived from Sasanian lotus motifs.

Of the 3,380 diamonds in the Pahlavi crown the most striking is the 60-karat, deep-yellow cushion brilliant at the center of the sunburst on the front; two 12-karat yellow cushion brilliants are centered in the side panels, and a 10-karat colorless marquise diamond is set above the front sunburst. Five emeralds of magnificent color and quality must certainly have come from the Chivor mines. One of them, an octagonal emerald-cut stone of velvet green and weighting 100 karats, is in the rear sunburst; another, of 65 karats, a dark-green oval with a carved flower motif and deep radial fluting, is set as a finial on the red velvet cap; three 14-karat hemispherical velvet-green emeralds are at the base of the plume and on each side of the front sunburst. Two 20-karat blue octagonal sapphires are set to the right and left of the rear sunburst; sapphires are rare in the Persian collection and must have come from Kashmir or Ceylon. The four stepped panels and headband are outlined by 369 natural pearls, the largest of 10.5 grains, on platinum bands inset with diamonds.

On 25 Ābān 1314 Š./16 November 1935 the entire collection of Persian crown jewels had been transferred by law to the Bānk-e melli (now Bānk-e markazī), where it is held as collateral for Persian bank notes. Beside the many pieces of jewelry and objets d'art, it includes thousands of unmounted stones in trays. Among the Golconda Indian diamonds the largest and finest is the Tāj-māh (Moon crown), an irregular Mughal cut of 115 karats. The Mughal Indian emeralds, of good to excellent quality, are polished, and most have been drilled longitudinally; some that are carved as flowers, engraved, or otherwise fashioned suggest former use as beads or in jewelry. One drilled irregular emerald is inscribed *Jehat tasbiḥ-e Šāhanšāhān Nāder Shah Šāḥeb-qerān bar taskīr-e Hend az jawāher-kāna entekāb šod 1152* (For the rosary of the king of kings Nāder, lord of the conjunction, at the conquest of India, from the jewel treasury (this) was selected, 1739-40; Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 46-47).

The spinels include a necklace weighing a total of 2,310 karats, the three largest stones ranging between 175 and 200 karats. A single deep-red, drilled, and plugged 500-karat spinel is the largest red spinel known. Historically more



important is an example weighing 270 karats, a polished, drilled lump inscribed 350 years ago with the name of the Mughal emperor Jahāngīr (1014-37/1605-27). It is the fourth largest red spinel on record; the second, of 414 karats, is in the Kremlin in Moscow, the third, weighing 361 karats, is the renowned “Tīmūr ruby” now among the British crown jewels (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 32-33).

The first queen to be crowned in Persia since the Arab conquest was Farah Dībā, who was crowned with her husband in 1346 Š./1967 (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 57). Pierre Arpels of Paris ornamented an emerald velvet cap with unset jewels chosen from the Persian royal collection. They include 105 pearls up to 22 mm long, 1,469 diamonds, 33 spinels and rubies, two red oval spinels of 83 karats each, and an oval 17 karat spinel. There are 32 emeralds, as well as two hexagons of 37 and 36 karats respectively and a central dark-green, radially fluted emerald weighing 91.32 karats and, below it, a 46.73-karat, dark-green, scallop-fluted, cabochon-drop emerald, both typical of Mughal carving. For Farah’s marriage to the shah in 1337 Š./1958 a tiara was made by Harry Winston of New York; it includes a heart-shaped border of baguettes and yellow, pink, and colorless diamonds under a crest of seven magnificent blue-green Colombian emeralds: an oval cabochon of 10 karats, the next of 18, and a round cabochon of 44 karats. In the center is an oval, step-cut emerald of 65 karats, then an oval cabochon of 48 karats, and two round cabochons of 24 and 10 karats respectively (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 138). A second tiara made by Harry Winston in 1958 consisted of an undulating band of colorless diamond baguettes, above which irregularly placed yellow, pink, and colorless brilliants uphold the Nūr-al-‘Ayn in the center. This superb pink and very limpid 10-karat stone is the world’s largest recorded rose-pink diamond of brilliant cut and once formed part of the “great table diamond” with the Daryā-ye Nūr (see above; Meen and Tushingham, 1968, p. 139).

Of the many necklaces and tiaras commissioned for royal marriages and coronations and reserved for the use of members of the imperial house (which had to be signed for each time they were requested, including by the queen herself) is a necklace of emeralds and diamonds, the stones of which, according to records, had belonged to Qamar al-Saltāna, daughter of Fath-‘Alī Shah (Meen and Tushingham, 1968, pp. 136-37).



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