



An Analysis of the Status of Gemstone Trade during the Ilkhanid and Timurid Periods

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Extended Abstract

The trade of gemstones during the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods constituted one of the most significant sectors of Iran's economy and reflected the country's political structure, geographical position, and extensive commercial relations. This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the status and main factors that contributed to the formation and expansion of this trade in the two aforementioned periods. The research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method, relying on historical and geographical sources, travelogues, and gemological works such as *Tansukh-nāmeh-ye Ilkhānī*, *Arāyes al-Jawāher*, and *Nafāyes al-Atāyeb*. The findings indicate that Iran's strategic location along the trade routes between East and West, the presence of domestic mines, the relative security of transportation routes, and the high demand from royal courts and the aristocracy were the key factors contributing to the prosperity of the gemstone trade.

During the Ilkhanid era, the establishment of political stability and the security of trade routes facilitated the connection between domestic markets and southern ports, easing the exchange of goods between Iran, India, Ceylon, and China. Major cities, particularly Tabriz and Baghdad, played a central role in this network. Tabriz, as the political and economic center of the Ilkhans, became one of the most important hubs for the gemstone trade due to its favorable geographical position and the presence of affluent social classes. In Tabriz's specialized bazaars, gemstones were cut and polished by local craftsmen, and their values were assessed by experts known as *Moqavemān*, who determined prices based on weight, color, and transparency. The existence of such a systematic evaluation process demonstrates the advanced economic organization and structural sophistication of gemstone trading during this period.

In Baghdad, the pearl trade also flourished. Pearls harvested from the Persian Gulf were graded and prepared for export to Mosul, Basra, India, China, and even Europe. Furthermore, Iran's southern ports, especially Hormuz and Kish, became key intermediaries in the exchange of goods between East and West. In these areas, along with the importation of rubies and diamonds from India, related industries such as



gemstone cutting and polishing developed considerably, and local craftsmanship played an important role in improving the quality and added value of these stones.

From a natural resource perspective, during the Ilkhanid period, Iran possessed rich mines, notably the turquoise of Nishapur and the pearls of the Persian Gulf, which met domestic needs and contributed significantly to exports. In addition to these native resources, the importation of gemstones such as rubies from Serandib (Ceylon), emeralds from Egypt and Hejaz, and diamonds from India was also common. Sustained commercial relations with China facilitated the import of jade from northern China into Iranian markets. The active participation of Iranian merchants in international trade routes, including the Silk Road and southern maritime pathways, consolidated Iran's role within the global network of the gemstone trade.

Besides these economic factors, the cultural and royal inclination toward jewelry and gemstones played a vital role in expanding this commerce. Gemstones at the time symbolized power, wealth, and royal splendor, being widely used in decorating palaces, crowns, and royal artifacts. The Mongols' affinity for symbolic colors, especially the white of pearls and the red of rubies, further increased the demand for and economic value of these items.

During the Timurid period, the development of the gemstone trade not only continued but also experienced a geographical shift from the western to the eastern regions of Iran. Samarcand, the capital of Amir Timur, located along the Silk Road, became the principal center for trading luxury goods. The large-scale import of gemstones from China, India, and Russia, along with the presence of skilled Chinese and Indian artisans at Timur's court, fostered the flourishing of the jewelry-making industry. To glorify his capital, Timur summoned goldsmiths and stonecutters from various regions to Samarcand. Consequently, the city evolved into one of the most prominent centers for gemstone production, cutting, and export in the Islamic world.

Herat, during the reign of Shahrukh, also witnessed remarkable economic and artistic prosperity. Government support for artisans and artists led to the establishment of numerous workshops specializing in gemstone cutting and jewelry-making. In Herat, the application of gemstones extended to decorative arts, weapon craftsmanship, and royal ornaments. Thus, Herat became not only a cultural and artistic hub but also a major economic center in the gemstone trade.

In western Iran, cities such as Tabriz and Soltaniyeh continued to serve as intermediaries linking the eastern, southern, and northern parts of the country. Pearls, turquoise, rubies, and emeralds were transported through the port of Hormuz to Soltaniyeh and then to the markets of Central Asia. The continuity of trade networks and the security of trade routes during this period enabled a stable and organized exchange of gemstones from southern Iran to Transoxiana.

In summary, the findings of this study reveal seven fundamental factors that contributed to the emergence and development of the gemstone trade in Iran during the Ilkhanid and Timurid eras:



1. Iran's strategic geographical position along the Silk Road and southern maritime routes;
2. Political stability and security of trade routes under both dynasties;
3. The abundance of domestic mines, such as the turquoise of Nishapur and the pearls of the Persian Gulf;
4. Broad commercial relations with India, China, Egypt, and Ceylon;
5. The prosperity of urban markets and the presence of wealthy social classes as major consumers;
6. Advances in techniques for cutting, polishing, and evaluating gemstones;
7. The cultural and political significance of jewelry in displaying royal power and magnificence.

The combination of these factors enabled Iran, from the seventh to the ninth centuries AH (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries CE), to become one of the leading centers of the gemstone trade in the Islamic world. The country's natural wealth, strategic location, and skilled human resources firmly established its economic and cultural position in the global trading network, making this industry one of the enduring foundations of Iran's economy and art.

Keywords: Gemstones, Trade, Ilkhanids, Timurids, Commercial markets.



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