

# Khaneh-tekani: An ancient tradition for getting rid of impurities



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## EXCLUSIVE

A few more days left until the Iranian New Year, Nowruz, and there is certain excitement among the people who are preparing to welcome the spring.

Every year at this time, the streets of Iran are full of people who are busy buying new clothes and appliances.

Passing through some of the alleys, especially those located in villages and old parts of the cities, you will see carpets and rugs that have been washed and hung from balconies or roofs to dry.

Spring cleaning, referred to as *khaneh-tekani* in Persian, literally meaning shaking up the house, is an age-old tradition in Iran.

In the last days of winter, ancient Persians used to break the worn-out clay dishes, throw away old appliances, and replace them with new ones. It was a symbolic act to drive out evil spirits and remove debris, blackness, poverty and sadness from their homes as they prepared to welcome the spring.

In ancient times, Persians believed that in the last days of the year, the souls of the deceased come to earth to visit their relatives and loved ones, thus, members of their family cleaned their houses to welcome them.

History shows that ancient Persians considered the family to be very important. They never did spring cleaning alone. All members of a household would get involved in the action carried out during a full day, and this helped

foster the spirit of teamwork among them.

The old tradition has another symbolic aspect. Just as one cleans one's place of residence from dirt and debris, one should also clean the inner self from all impurities to prepare for a better life in the New Year.

Moreover, the importance that Islam attaches to hygiene has helped the *khaneh-tekani* tradition remain in the Iranian culture for so long.

As one of the numerous valuable heritages left by our ancestors, this popular tradition is still observed by Iranian people. It is also prevalent among the rituals performed by most people of the countries that celebrate Nowruz: Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan.

*Khaneh-tekani* can have several health benefits. A dusty environment is very harmful to human health. Spring cleaning is a great opportunity for people to rid themselves of the dust that can cause various diseases and allergies.

Moreover, getting involved in *khaneh-tekani* increases your physical activity and makes you burn more calories.

Meanwhile, dirt and disorder in our environment can contribute to mental confusion and underactivity. Research shows that the act of cleaning can help reduce stress and anxiety by 20 percent.

However, the old tradition of *khaneh-tekani* is a sign of the depth and richness of the Iranian culture. Persians clean their houses from top to bottom to invite spring, the renewal of nature, to every corner of their houses.



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## Iran in the Neolithic

Until about 60 years ago the period between 20,000 and 5,000 BCE in Iran and the Middle East was a wide knowledge gap. Before this time Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers were living there, then sedentary village dwellers. Robert Braidwood of the Oriental Institute in Chicago, by his excavation projects, was the first to bring on research on this period. One of his major fields of work was Western Iran, particularly the area around Kermanshah in the Zagros Mountains. After his works there followed field research by younger archaeologists in the lowlands of Khuzestan, in Azarbaijan, in the plain of Qazvin, and in the Mardasht between 1960 and 1980.

Today we are supplied with a much more dense framework of excavations and knowledge from surveys. But concerning the Neolithic, still huge parts of Iran are not marked on the map and we may excitedly wait for the results of future research.

### Time and geography

For summing up the present knowledge of the Neolithic it is at first necessary to define the basic dimensions of all archaeological knowledge, which are time and space. If in this case space, i. e. Iran, is easy to define, the definition of time meets difficulties as, though we are provided with radiocarbon dating, which is a scientifically solid and more and more reliable source, many older radiocarbon datings are unclear and often contradictory. Even today archaeologists see no other possibility than additionally using criteria for dating which do not belong to a scientific discipline. Thus two approaches are employed. One compares the material cultures of certain places or their strata, a method of "relative chronology



Tappeh Asiab  
FARZAD MENATI/TASNIM NEWS AGENCY

which causes some problems particularly when early periods are concerned. On the one hand, the style of the artefacts – e.g. stone blades in the Early Neolithic – did not change fast enough.

On the other hand, particularly conspicuous turning points of the development of material culture, e.g. the development of pottery, are supposed to have happened in wide regions at the same time.

This approach does not take into the account that in one region the technology of pottery might have been developed much earlier or later than in another one.

A second way of dating causes similar problems. Ecologically orientated archaeologists used to study how wild animals and plants were gradually domesticated. Then from these observations

complex theories were developed. We are talking about "broad spectrum revolution", "incipient agriculture", "food resource management" etc. Many scientists assume a timely succession of steps for taking over natural resources. But also in this case, like in the case of pottery, there are indications for the idea that hunting and collecting was not given up at all places at the same time.

The end of the Palaeolithic, called "Epipalaeolithic", is in a period of about 7,000 years from c. 18,000 to 11,000 BCE. In those days groups of hunter-gatherers were mostly living in the caves of the Zagros Mountains. Compared to earlier groups of game hunters, a tendency towards increasing the number of the kinds of plants and animals, which were collected and hunted, can be observed. Not only smaller vertebrates were hunted but also pistachios and wild fruit were collected. Finally, consuming snails and smaller aquatic animals like crabs is new. We know almost nothing about the 2,500 years which followed the Epipalaeolithic after 11,000 BCE. Only when discovering the place of Tappeh Asiab in Kermanshah area we are in better known periods. Tappeh Asiab was a small camp of hunter-gatherers, only seasonally inhabited. Besides the fact that wild goats and sheep were hunted, great numbers of snail shells were found. These finds were interpreted in the way that from time to time the hunting activities of the inhabitants of Asiab were unsuccessful and that then they were forced to consume food which they usually did not like.

Some nearby and more constantly occupied settlements in the Zagros region date from a short time after Asiab, from the time between 8,000 and 6,800 BCE.

The above is a lightly edited version of part of a chapter entitled, 'Iran in the Neolithic', from a book entitled, 'Persian Antiques Splendor', edited by T. Stollner, R. Slotta, and A. Vatandoust, published by German Mining Museum.