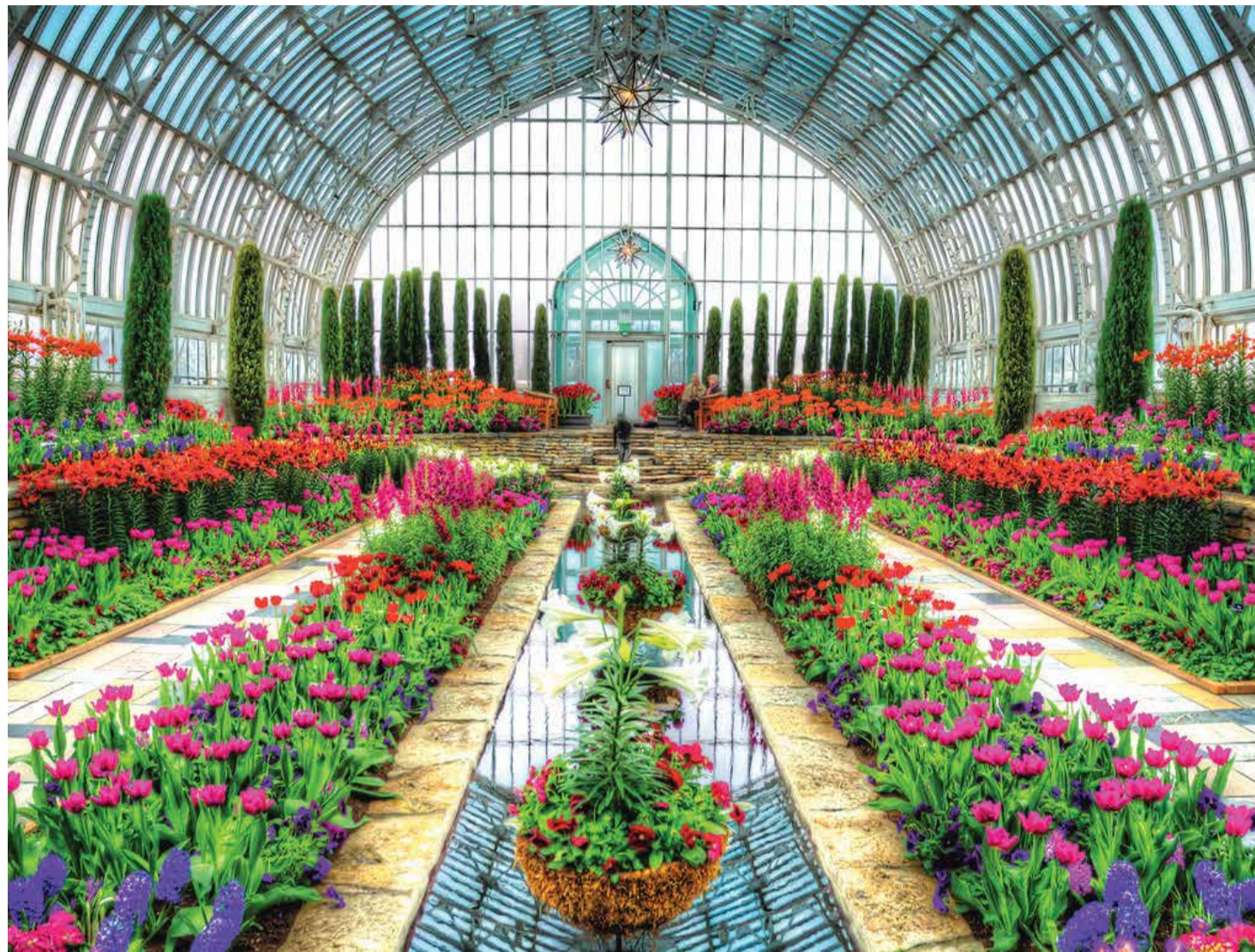


Visit Mahallat, Iran's cut-flower capital



golestane-yas.com

A hot spring in Mahallat
gardeshgar1724.com

seeiran.ir

Atashkuh Fire Temple
itto.org

Iranica Desk

The city of Mahallat, resting in the embrace of colorful flowers, is located 262km southeast of Tehran in the central province of Markazi. It is home to an impressive selection of attractions, making it well worth a visit.

A variety of colorful flowers, numerous soaring plane trees, which surround its streets, and the movements of ornamental fish in the ponds,

along with other natural beauties have created a spectacular landscape at the juncture of Alborz and Zagros mountain ranges, IRNA wrote.

Flower gardens

Numerous flower gardens are in 300 greenhouses of the city, with a total area of 1,000 hectares. The city, with a very pleasant climate, is famous as the 'cut-flower capital of Iran' or 'the Netherlands of Iran'. It hosts a large num-

ber of tourists from various parts of the country every year, especially in the spring and summer. While walking in the gardens, the combination of eye-catching colors and pleasant aroma of the flowers will leave a pleasant memory.

About 95 percent of the country's seasonal flowers are cultivated in Mahallat, which is home to the largest flower gardens in Iran. About 700 types of cactus and mums, in 800 colors,

are cultivated in the city.

Health tourism

Due to having several bubbling hot springs, Mahallat has also turned into a hub of health tourism. The springs are 15km north-east of Mahallat, near Neyneh village. For years, Iranians, especially those living in Markazi Province and the cities of Qom, Kashan and Isfahan, have traveled to Mahallat to use its abundant recreational and

health tourism facilities.

Historical attractions

The historical sites of the city, along with its natural attractions, draw many visitors to the region. Atashkuh Fire Temple, located in Nimvar, is one of the most important and well-known Zoroastrian fire temples in the world. Five kilometers from Nimvar Road, near a village with the same name, Atashkuh Fire Temple dates back to the Sassan-

id Era. Available historical evidence shows that the monument was in use until the 10th century BCE. Khorheh is another historical site which is a popular destination for travelers arriving in the region. It is located next to a village with the same name, 48km southeast of Mahallat. Only two stone pillars, with the height of eight meters each, a part of its stone walls, and some old graves remain from this historical site.

Archeologists believe that a recreational site belonging to the Seleucid kings and a temple, dating back to the Parthian era, were in Khorheh, which was settled by humans in the 2nd century BCE.

Old name

In some historical books, Mahallat is referred to as 'Sayer Al Bolouk' (other regions) because, according to ancient maps, it was not a part of Qom and Kashan.

Symbolism of hunting scenes on silver plates

Fragments of eastern Iranian epic cycles are preserved in the Avestan texts, where they narrate the struggle of the kings to acquire the qualities of some deities – strength, invincibility and success.

The visible incarnation of the deity had to be literally captured or seized. Not only the hero-kings of the Iranian epics but also the founder of the Sassanid state, Ardashir, had to first obtain possession of the "good fortune of Khwarnah of the Kayanids" in the form of a large ram, according to the account in the romance devoted to him.

This solves the mystery of the symbolism of the hunting scenes on Sassanid silver plates. The qualities of a true, legitimate ruler of Iran constitute the sole symbolism found on ceremonial royal metalware of the early Sassanid era, presented in strict, exact compositions repeated without alteration from one object to another.

These pieces were fashioned in a central royal workshop up to 480 BCE. The legitimacy of royal power are symbolically represented by the "capture" of Khwarnah in the form of the most popular hypostasis, a mountain ram, the strength of this power by the struggle with

the lion and its triumph by the struggle with the wild boar. Silver plates bearing such compositions were essentially for propaganda purposes.

By the end of the 4th century, however, scenes of royal hunts on silver plates were gradually giving way to depictions of the heroic or epic victory of the king of kings. Of course, one cannot say that the Zoroastrian symbolical composition in its pure sense was no longer recognised – it still occurs on 5th-century objects – but the range of buyers for metalwork had widened and this, it seemed, had somewhat altered the repertory of subjects. This development of iconography is characteristic of the evolution of all Sassanid art; it is a movement from orthodoxy to the everyday subject requiring no religious interpretation. The theme of the heroic hunt flourished especially in the 5th century. Later, this subject, too, was reduced to a simple genre scene, or even to the level of literary illustration of some particular hunting story. Royal horsemen were already being depicted wearing, as a rule, standard "impersonal" crowns.

Three silver plates – two in The State Hermitage Museum, one in a private collection in

the USA – provide examples of such a hunting story, representing one of the exploits of Prince Varahrán.

These depictions are the first and possibly the only clear examples of genuine illustrations of oral or written tales of the skill and valour of an Iranian knight.

But in the sparse Sassanid literature of the 6th-7th centuries that has reached us we find tales of skill and prowess in chivalrous sports (hunting, polo, the mastery of various weapons and especially skill at archery) and also of proficiency in games. One of those works, Khusrau, Son of Kavadh, and His Page, tells the story of a woman who played the *chang* (a Persian musical instrument) and who accompanied kings on their hunts; they are often depicted, for example in hunting scenes of the Khusrau II (reliefs at Taq-e Bostan).

Judging by the story of Ferdowsi, a woman playing *chang* also took part in the marvelous gazelle hunt of Bahram Gur, though on silver vessels showing this scene she has no instrument in her hands. A host of such beauties with harps, flutes and *changs* are depicted on silver vessels – flasks, deep hemispherical bowls and shallow dishes.



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The above is a lightly edited version of part of chapter entitled, "Persian Art: From Antiquity to the 19th Century", from a book entitled, "Persian Art, The Lost Treasures", written by Vladimir Lukonin and Anatoli Ivanov, published by Parkstone International.