

Shahrud's handicraft sector is thriving

Iranica Desk

Shahrud, a city in the north-central province of Semnan, with an area of 41,000 sq.km, stretches from the southern slopes of Alborz mountain range to Dasht-e Kavir. A decrease in elevation from its northern to southern parts has helped create various types of climate and ecosystems. More than 60 fields of handicrafts are produced in the city including pottery-making, textile weaving, precious and semi-precious stone cutting, *namad-mali* (felt-beating), as well as wood, leather and metal crafting, kilim-weaving, *jajim*-weaving and *monabat-kari*, chtn. ir wrote.

The skills of weaving wool and cotton fabrics in the city have been registered on Iran's Intangible Cultural Heritage List. The largest number of textile weaving workshops are in Kalateh-ye Khij town, located 56km from Shahrud.

Pottery-making
The creative local potters use the rich soil of the region to produce various



Pottery items of Shahrud
● IRNA

ceramic items. The city is known as one of the main hubs of pottery production. The lightest, largest and thinnest clay bricks of the world are among the works created by proficient Shahrudi artisans.

Kilim-weaving
Kilim is a type of thin handwoven floor covering. Nomadic women living in

the region are among the most skilled kilim-weavers of the country. Thanks to the training courses held by Shahrud's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, the kilim-weaving craft has become very prevalent in the city in recent years. Ground looms are used by the city's craftspeople for weaving traditional

kilims. The kilims woven in the city feature designs inspired by nature, include animals, birds, black tents and geometric shapes.

Jajim-weaving
Jajim is among the most beautiful and colorful traditional textiles woven mostly in the mountainous parts of Shahrud. After spinning and dyeing the

wool, the craftswomen, working mostly in traditional workshops of the region, weave the delicate patterned *jajims*, which are very famous in the region and country.

Monabat-kari
Monabat-kari craft is also very common in Shahrud and its surrounding areas. The artworks pro-

duced in the regions not only meet the demands of the domestic market but are also exported to various foreign countries. A number of master carvers living in Shahrud and a number of its villages make exquisite wood carved tableaus, which have many customers across the country and the world.

Namad-mali
Namad-mali (felt-beating) is the art of beating the interweaving wool fibers, with soap and water. *Namad* is a type of traditional fabric which is used as floor covering or shepherds' clothing. Felt is a kind of textile that is made without the use of a loom. The craft has long been practiced in various cities of Semnan Province.



Kilim-weaving
● inh.ir



Monabat-kari
● gardeshitop.com



Namad-mali
● kojara.com

The settlements in Iranian Azarbaijan did not attain urban dimensions during the Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Ages. The large settlement mound at Geoy Tappeh mostly originates from later times, and the sparse occupation remains of the Late Chalcolithic are by no means representative. In Yanik Tappeh, a Chalcolithic and Bronze Age archaeological site in East Azarbaijan Province, an enclosure wall made of stone was erected at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age. At the same time, a completely new style of architecture was introduced and the houses now show a circular ground plan. The emergence of fortification walls can be traced over a wide geographical area that ranges from Sos Höyük in Anatolia to Yanik Tappeh in Azarbaijan. More evidence also stems from numerous settlement sites that are only known through surface surveys. Fortification walls are often considered as a typical indicator for urban settlements, though in this case they rather seem to suggest a persistent need of protection by the inhabitants. This might indicate the imminent pres-

Early settlements in Iran



Tappeh Chogha Mish
● itto.org

ence of the same groups that eventually brought about the cultural break between the Late Chalcolithic and the Early Bronze Age. In the East, archaeological evidence for Chalcolithic settlements so far still remains elusive. However, by the end of the 4th millennium, in the oases along the fringe of the desert, large cities with extended craftsmen's quarters

begin to emerge. The best-known are Shahr-e Sokhteh in Sistan and Baluchestan Province and Shahdad in Kerman. As on the Iranian plateau further east, the existence of specialized industrial settlements can also be detected here, for example at Tappeh Yahya, an archaeological site in Kerman Province, where a workshop for chlorite vessels



Tappeh Yahya
● kojara.com

has been discovered. Jiroft on the Halil Rud, an addition to the archaeological map of this period, is another large settlement with extended cemeteries. Re-

search in this newly established cultural region is still at the very beginning, but it is already obvious that another highly differentiated urban society existed here. The lowland of Khuzestan is the most comprehensively researched area, where, similar to the situation in Fars Province, settlements had been on the decline throughout the 5th millennium BCE. But with the late 5th millennium Susa and Abu Fanduwah started to expand into regional centres, and at the middle of the 4th millennium BCE a third centre emerged at Tappeh Chogha Mish, the site of a Chalcolithic settlement in Western Iran, larger than the other two. This settlement consists of a systematically planned upper and lower town, and incorporates monumental architecture and craftsmen's quarters. At the same time, the concentration of settlements along the western edge of the plain suggests that the eastern half of the Susiana was largely under the control of nomadic groups. Whether the three urban centres were in economical or political competition with each other, is a question that cannot be answered at this time.

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