

Yazd Water Museum offers a fascinating glimpse into hidden world of desert waterways

The city of Yazd, the capital of the central province of Yazd, is famous for its qanats (underground aqueducts), and the Yazd Water Museum, one of the best of its kind, is devoted to the brave men who built them. Located in a restored mansion with a visible qanat running underneath, the museum offers, through a series of photographs, exhibits and architectural drawings, a fascinating glimpse into the hidden world of waterways that have allowed life to flourish in the desert. lonelyplanet.com reported.

The uniform of the qanat builders shows an early form of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), with padded cotton hats and white clothing that was luminous in the dark and would act as a shield in the event of an accident.

The museum, which charts the 2,000 years that Iran's unique irrigation system has been in operation, describes the drilling of mother wells (which can reach a depth of 300 meters, such as the qanat near Mashad) and the use of water distribution clocks. These clocks (basically, a bowl with a hole in the bottom) helped to mark the 15- or 20-minute shares of water purchasable by households or farmers.

Qanats run through many of the wealthy old houses in Yazd, collecting in basement pools, known as *sardob*. As the coolest part

of the house, these rooms were often beautifully decorated and several fine examples exist in Yazd's old traditional hotels today.

Qanats, many of which run through each town, are the reason why the wealthiest districts are always closest to the mountains – to be closest to the freshest water.

There exist also old water ownership documents that imply how wealthy farmers or households would purchase water.

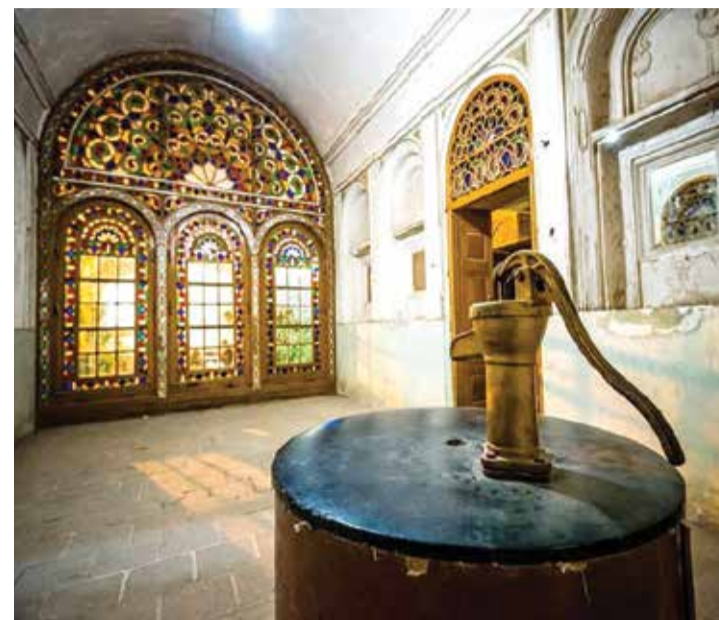
By visiting the museum, you can fully understand how such an architectural and engineering masterpiece of the ancient world, like Nashtifan Windmills, would work.

The museum has different levels, all of which are open to the public. Each level has its own characteristics. Levels are connected together through a stairway called *payab*. For example, one level was for storing food and fruits. One was used as a living room due to the cool and pleasant atmosphere. And one was used for saving water.

In 2016, the Persian qanat was registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It is a great evidence of cultural tradition and civilization in the deserts of Iran. The Yazd Water Museum opened in 2000 by the Yazd Regional Water Authority. However, as a mansion, its construction and beautification work was completed in 1887.



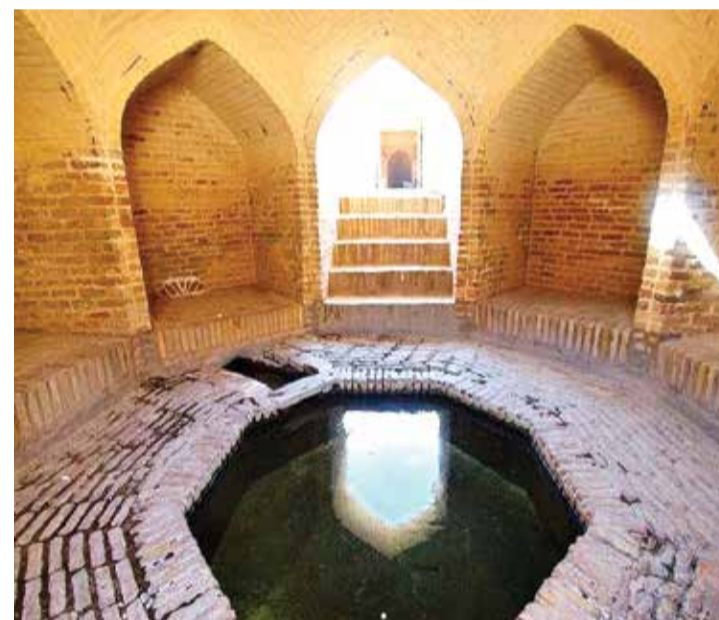
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Boldness in Safavid arts

The development of a style of writing, the curvilinear *nastaliq* script, in the Safavid Period reflects the tendency towards finding conceptual links between the visual and the textual. *Nastaliq* was visually suited to the sound of Persian poetic language and was used at first solely for Persian poetry. That it carries within its swagger of line such emotive responses inspired its use for Persian inscriptions on architectural epigraphic bands, but also on all kinds of objects, from textiles and carpets to armour and candlesticks.

The Heech piece of sculpture by Parviz Tanavoli plays with those potentialities of the *nastaliq* script: By spelling the Persian word for nothingness in a large, elegantly twisting body of three letters in bold red *nastaliq*, it makes a thought-provoking, philosophical mockery of the very meaning of the word.

Other representations of such complex visual, textual and conceptual networks of meaning are found in narrative and figurative motifs on textiles: They become animated when worn as robes; and they trigger recitation of familiar poems or proverbs. Similarly, instruments of illumination — candlesticks and torches — carry on their surfaces poetic fragments in *nastaliq* script that relate to a mental image of light, the

light of the divine, of love and yearning. The candle sacrifices itself as it burns down while giving light and attracting the moth (a metaphor for the soul).

Manuscripts are designed to impress by their grandeur but also by the way they are held, touched and seen. The *falnameh* (book of omens) folios were made extraordinarily large, with the narrative image rendered in bold colours and large-scale figures to allow for viewing and hearing the *fal* (fortune) being read out loud. The *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp breaks the record in every respect: It is the largest of the luxury copies of the text in manuscript form to have been produced up to that point, with an unprecedented high ratio of painting to text folios, and a consistently high concentration of skills and expertise throughout its entire production. The most amazing product of the Safavid *ketabkhaneh* (library), it must have been perceived as a sharp cultural weapon for it to have been sent as a gift to Ottoman Sultan Selim upon his accession. This was not done to appease the enemy, who was often victorious on the battlefield, but to boast about the realm in which the Safavids could not be defeated — art.

Animated objects abound in this period and become even more expressive in the

seventeenth century: Metalwork and ceramics enriched with poems that call to mind images and speak to the function of the object as if made eloquent; textiles that recall in their woven patterns and through the very act of weaving threads mental images and scenes better known from poetry and painting.

These artistic tendencies go hand in hand with a purposeful scenography of seeing: How the onlookers touched, viewed and sensed these luxury things was an important consideration in the process of making them. Large repeat figures would sway before the viewer's eyes if woven out of silk velvet, which responds to the direction of light and movement. Boldness in Safavid arts is ordinarily not about scale of motifs or the high contrast of colours. Rather it is in the way the object, the work of art, animates the imagination; the way it asks for close looking and sustained attention; it lies in noting the awesomeness of the tight weave of delicate threads and the miniature-like effect of the woven image; and the splendid effects of pounced gold leaf against deep brilliant blue as foils for warrior figures, dappled horses and other motifs which come alive as light changes if one could turn the pages in the *Shahnameh* of Shah Tahmasp.



● Safavid metalworkers introduced new shapes like these torch-like candlesticks.