

Gelkari, an old tradition revived in Ramsar



An overview of Javaherdeh village
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Iranica Desk

The old traditions and customs of each region have roots in its culture and identity, the preservation of which would lead to the development and maintenance of social cohesion.

A large number of traditional rituals and ceremonies have been prevalent in the northern province of Mazandaran, showing the cultural values and beliefs of its local people. Thus, extensive measures have been carried out in past years to prevent these traditional rituals from fading away.

Javaherdeh village, a popular resort with a pleasant climate, is located 25 kilometers from the center of Ramsar. A number of historically valuable cemeteries and monuments are in the village, one of which is Adineh Mosque, dating back 800 years. The mosque, which has been frequently subjected to natural disasters throughout history,

and was once destroyed by fire, was rebuilt again in the past years. Like other old buildings of this village, this mosque was made of wood and mud with no columns.

The building of the old mosque is beautiful and unique in such a way that many tourists travel to the region to visit this monument.

Gelkari (mud-making) is a traditional and religious ritual, attended by thousands of people from Mazandaran and Gilan provinces, which was held in Javaherdeh village in ancient times.

According to historical documents, which are available in Mazandaran Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, the ritual dates back 5,000 years.

On the day of the ceremony, local villagers and livestock breeders milked their animals and prepared a mud mixture of milk and soil.

All people, including men and women, young and old, participated in the ceremony to spread the prepared mud on the wall of the mosque, to clean the mosque of any impurity.

This rite was not held for many years, but efforts made by the villagers and related officials caused it to revive again.

Director General of Mazandaran Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, Sadeq Barzegar, told IRNA that the ritual was held in Adineh Mosque this year, after a 45-year hiatus, thanks to attempts made by the members of the village's rural management department in cooperation with the locals.

He added that revival of the old rituals and customs would have a positive impact on regional tourism.

He noted that *gelkari* has roots in the religious beliefs of the people who have lived in Javaherdeh village through-

out history, pointing out that re-creation of the ritual would help preserve the interior and exterior surface of the old rural houses and mosques.

Due to this geographical feature and its cool and pleasant weather, no wonder that Javaherdeh is a perfect destination in the summer.

When visiting Javaherdeh, it is not only the village that is worth seeing but also the route. The dreamy scenery of clouds and mountains covered with trees will make you speechless. Just like fairy tales, you have to pass all these adventures and a tortuous road to get to the destination.

The first thing you will notice once you enter the village road from Ramsar is its green forests and hills. By the time you reach Javaherdeh, these trees will gradually be replaced by green meadows full of flowers.

Have you brought your camera with you? Happy shooting!



Adineh Mosque
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Gelkari
● IRNA

Development of Sassanid art

Looking at Sassanid art as a whole, one reaches the conclusion that it began with a fairly limited range of themes strictly stratified according to genre, as an art that was, so to speak, "conceptual", or at any rate subject to an absolutely specific interpretation, and "imperial", an instrument for political propaganda. In late Sassanid art, however, genres blend; complex religious symbolism chang-

es into benedictory symbolism; the symbolic banquet, battles and hunting scenes become ordinary tales of hunting exploits, many feasts and chivalry.

The further art develops, the more all these initial, symbolic scenes and compositions become either illustrations or mere ornamentation.

One could go so far as to say that towards the end of the

Sassanid Period the illustrative and ornamental themes played the main role in art, although, of course, the propagandist themes of the "imperial style" also survived until the very end of the period, especially in official works of art (rock reliefs, palace decorations, coins and gems).

In discussing the illustrative aspect of late Sassanid art one cannot avoid mentioning Sassanid literature.

About a hundred titles of various religious, literary and scientific works of this time are known from different sources. A few dozen books of various kinds have reached us, mostly via translations

into Arabic and later also into Persian, a hundred or more years after the fall of the Sassanid state, or even in revised versions of a comparatively late date. It is difficult to distinguish between their various accretions from different periods, to make any sense of the blending of various styles and genres. In the course of translation from Middle Persian a sort of compendium was usually produced. In official manifestos of the kings and rock inscriptions (3rd century) mention is made of official state records, statutes and codices produced under each king.

This is also reported by much later foreign sources relating the history of the Sassanids. Probably it was these official state-records that were reported by the Arab historian al-Mas'udi, who in 915 CE saw a manuscript in Istakhr which contained the his-

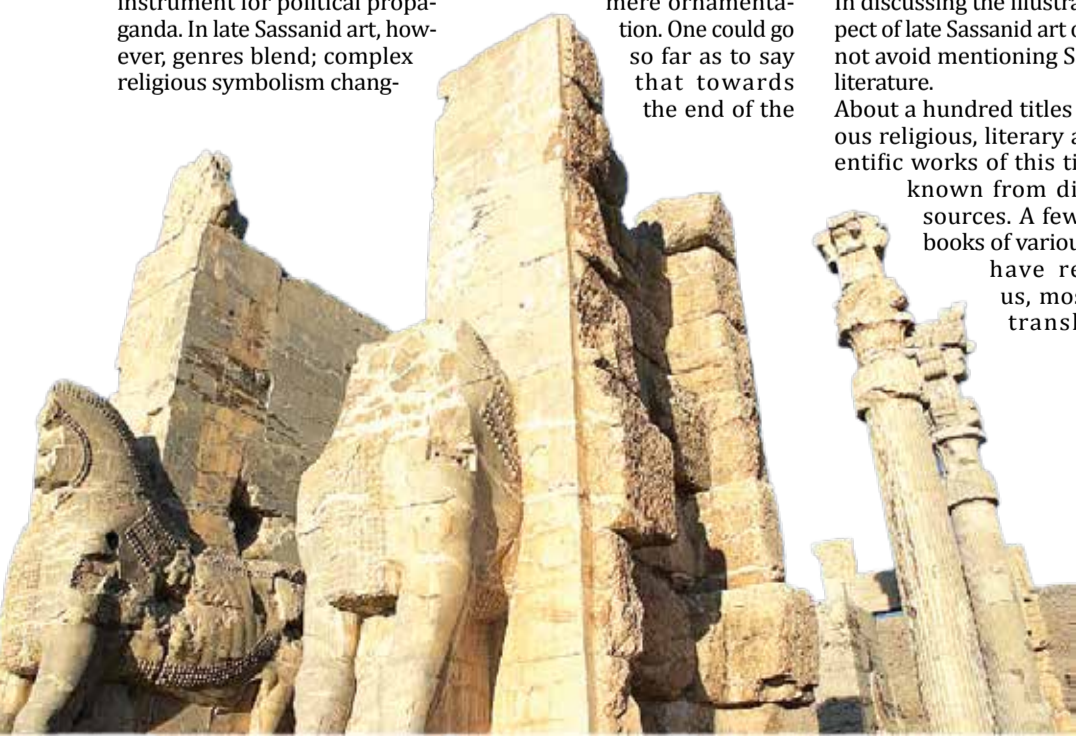
tory of the Sassanids – all twenty-seven kings who had ruled, as the manuscript stated, for 433 years, one month and seventeen days.

All these kings were portrayed in the manuscript. Another medieval historian, Hamza Isfahani, saw just such a manuscript (or perhaps the very same one). He left a description of the portraits of "kings and courtiers, famous guardians of the fire, all priests and others noted among the Persians".

These illustrations were typical official portraits. The crown was precisely depicted, the kings stood or sat on their throne. The manuscript was translated from the original into Arabic for the Caliph Hisham. It was completed in 731 CE and this is probably the earliest record of the translation of Middle Persian works. A few compendiums of the 10th-12th centuries preserve

fragments of similar translations and they confirm that in terms of their content such books were records of state affairs, arranged not by year but by separate reigns. Around the 4th century comes the first reliable report of literary works being among such records, and of their being collected into specific anthologies, their abundant subject-matter relating as a rule to distant antiquity. We know in particular of one such story, Rast-sukhan (The Truthful Word).

The story has not survived, but apparently it contained the legendary history of the founder of the Sassanid state – Ardashir, the son of Bapak – and was similar to the Book of the Deeds of Ardashir, known in a late Sassanid version (4th century). It is possible that both these works were combined into one text in the 6th century.



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. The photo was taken from the book.