



At 3600 meters on Mount Gargash, the Iranian National Observatory enjoys favorable seeing conditions.
PARSA BIGDELI/science.org

Mt. Gargash
ino.org.ir

Iran's return to global astronomical community a significant achievement

Iranica Desk

The establishment of the Iran National Observatory (INO), as one of the largest scientific projects implemented in the country, entered an important stage last year when it recorded the first light image of its 3.4m optical telescope. The fulfillment of this project, which is over 20 years old, caused Iran to return to the global astronomical community after eight centuries. The establishment of INO, as one of the major national astronomical projects, has been a great achievement

for the country. The project, which was launched in the Iranian year to March 2001, received its first funding from the government budget in the year to March 2006. Despite the obstacles created by the sanctions imposed on Iran, this telescope was completely designed and made by domestic experts and only its mirrors were imported from abroad. Head of the Institute for Research in Fundamental Sciences Mohammad Javad Larijani said that setting up the INO is one of the most significant scientific projects im-

plemented in the country in recent decades. Following last year's announcement made by Iranian astronomers about the recording of the first light image of INO's 3.4m optical telescope, Science Journal, one of the most prestigious scientific journals of the world, published an article in which it referred to the telescope as a world-class device. It wrote that Iranian scientists and engineers faced major hurdles building the Iranian National Observatory, including sanctions that curtail high-tech imports and visa restric-

tions limiting their travel abroad. INO Project Director Habib Khosroshahi said that none of Iranian universities has so far experienced the implementation of such a great scientific project. "The execution of the project gained more momentum as of 2018, and the total process of the construction, installation and commissioning was carried out in a period of four years," he said. He added that due to the absence of modern and advanced telescopes in neighboring countries, Iran, a country with high

mountain ranges, is a suitable geographical location for professional astronomical observatories. Khosroshahi said that the establishment of INO has provided a huge and unique experience for Iran's science and technology sector, adding that it is an important step taken for the revival of astronomy and cosmology in the country after eight centuries. "Astronomical imagers and spectrometers are expected to be installed on its telescope in the current and coming years," he noted. The world-class, 3.4-meter optical telescope is

suitable for observing and studying a wide range of astronomical and cosmic objects. Gerry Gilmore, an astronomer at the University of Cambridge and chair of INO's international advisory board, said INO's scientific odyssey began two decades ago— and faced long odds. "When they started this project, it was just a dream. No one in Iran had attempted anything on this scale before," he added. Thanks to its geographic location, the INO project is expected to attract international astronomers. The

site selection campaign was concluded by selecting Mt. Gargash, at 3,600m above sea level in central Iran, 110km north of the city of Isfahan. The INO project goes far beyond the design and development of the telescope itself. Its 16m-diameter, 22m-high modern enclosure and dome are also manufactured by the local industry. The INO project progressed faster than expected in the construction phase, thanks to the dedicated and agile management and the hard work of its small but highly motivated staff.

Persian art in Central and East Europe

With the exception of Poland — its adjective "Polonaise" was and is still associated with a certain type of Persian carpet — the collections of Persian art in Central and East Europe were for a long time relatively neglected, compared to Ottoman material culture, a subject which has attracted a reasonable deal of research interest in both local and international scholarly communities. As an academic discipline, Turkology in both pre-Islamic and Islamic times had already been developed as early as the first half of the 19th century, especially in Austria, owing to its diplomatic links with the Ottoman Empire, and in Hungary, thanks to its once-presumed linguistic tie with the ancient Turks. Arabic was also widely studied in Central and East Europe as a principal tool for the understanding of Islam, and this was closely linked to the translation and interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and other Islamic

religious texts. On the other hand, Persian studies lagged behind in the region, compared with West Europe, and remained a secondary subject that was merely part of Islamic, Middle Eastern or Oriental studies, as well as in some cases part of Indology. Nevertheless, some important achievements in Persian art studies were made as a by-product of Turkish philology, such as *Einführung in die persische Paläographie* (Budapest, 1977) by the Ottoman scholar Lajos Fekete (1891–1969 CE), published posthumously, which remains the standard work in the subject until today. In contrast to the slow emergence of Persian studies in Central Europe, art historians of the region discovered Persian art much earlier than those of West Europe, and Persian art was already included into the discussion of general art history. For example, the first general survey of world architecture, the *Entwurf einer*



Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan
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Historischen Architektur by the Austrian architect Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach (1633–1723 CE) provided examples of the then recently built monuments of Isfahan. This marked the begin-

nings of a tradition of non-western art historians in the region, namely those without formal training in Oriental studies but with openness to look at the history of art from a global perspec-

tive, such as Alois Riegl (1858–1905 CE) and Joseph Strzygowski. It is also interesting to note that, while carpets, textiles and architectural decoration remained focal points of connoisseurship, the first

essay ever written for a journal about the Persian paintings from the Topkapi Saray albums was, rather unexpectedly, published in Hungary in the 1880s by the art historian Jenő Radisics (1956–1917). Poland established a strong academic interest in the art of Persia in the early 20th century, with the growth of a small yet exquisite scholarly community as well as its international reputation, and despite the long interruptions due to the war and communist times, the Polish scholarship of Persian and Islamic art has been, albeit slowly, in the process of recapturing its pre-war spirit. The works of several figures in the region has so far received little international recognition, but the Austrian Joseph von Karabacek (1845–1918 CE), another Austrian Ernst Diez (1878–1961 CE), the Hungarian Nándor Fettich (1900–1971 CE) and the Polish Tadeusz Mankowski (1878–

1956 CE) deserve special attention for their contributions to the development of Persian art studies in Central Europe. In the meantime, the Ukrainian-born Mikhail Rostovtzeff (1870–1952 CE) and others discovered the Irano-Greek archaeological substratum of South Russian art across the Eurasian steppe at the turn of the 20th century. This had strong repercussions in the Persian-oriented scholarly minds of early 20th-century Poland and Hungary — both of which nurture a rich tradition of Sarmatian and Scythian mythology. Persian art does certainly exist in other neighbouring states, although its presence is virtually unknown outside the region. Apart from Slovakia, which, along with its collections, was formerly part of Hungary, the Czech Republic possesses small but interesting collections of Persian art, including the Persian manuscript collection in the National Library.