

Globally registered Tabriz Bazaar under restoration

Inscription on UNESCO's List is of great importance



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The historical Bazaar of Tabriz, the capital city of the northwestern province of East Azarbaijan, is one of the largest covered markets of the world and the first of its kind which has been registered on UNESCO's World Heritage List, said head of the city's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department. Speaking in an exclusive interview with Iran Daily, Ramin Asbaqi said a project to restore the ceiling, walls and domes of the bazaar has been launched.

He noted that the old bazaar, extending in an area of one square kilometer, was globally registered in 2010.

Referring to the strategic geographical location of Tabriz, located on the Silk Road, he said considering that commercial caravans from different parts of the world were constantly passing through Tabriz, this bazaar, which was a very prosperous and important market, has expanded over time. He added that the bazaar is known as one of the important and most visited tourism centers of the city, drawing many Iranian and foreign travelers every day. Asbaqi noted that registration on a cultural, his-



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torical or natural site on UNESCO's List not only helps preserve it, but has a direct positive impact on the regions' economic and cultural sectors. This important development would help strengthen the subcultures of the region, increase domestic and international social and

economic partnerships, and ensure preserving the site's historical and cultural identity. "The sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List belong to all people on earth, regardless of race, religion and nationality, thus governments are duty-bound to preserve and

maintain them," he said. The official said that global registration of a work can also help attract scientific and social participation, draw financial and educational aids and increase the number of tourists arriving in the region.

"The issue that makes many people, even politicians, interested in global registration of their country's historical and cultural heritage is that this can help prove that their homeland has played a role in the establishment of human history," he noted.

"However, in my opinion, development of the tourism industry and generation of income are the most significant results of global registration. This

important occurrence usually motivates local officials to create the required infrastructures, including access roads and accommodation centers, to encourage more tourists to travel to the region." He said, nowadays, it is very important for international tourists to visit a globally registered site.

He said a number of training courses would usually be offered to local people to raise their knowledge about the importance of protecting such sites.

He said 42 tangible and 45 intangible heritages of Iran have been registered on UNESCO's List, driving the country to stand ninth among all countries of the world in this regard.



▲ Ramin Asbaqi

Ancient settlements on eastern shore of Caspian Sea

In antiquity, to the north of Abaskun in Gorgan, on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, there was only one inhabited place, Dehistan, six days' journey from Abaskun. Here was the border between Muslim domains and those of the nomads, the Ghuzz Turks. For this reason there was a ribat here; in this case the term was used in its original sense of a military post at a frontier.

The foundation of Dehistan was attributed to the Parthians; European scholars usually connect the word Dehistan with the name of the Dahae, a nation that, according to the classical geographers, lived to the east of the Caspian Sea.

According to Tabari (a Muslim historian and scholar from Amol, Tabaristan), there was at a distance of five farsakhs (an old measure of length which is

equal to about 5 to 5.5 kilometers) from Dehistan an island, or, more exactly, a peninsula (as in the work of the anonymous tenth-century Persian geographer) on which a certain Turkish prince lived.

Istakhri (a 10th-century travel author and Islamic geographer) and Ibn Hawqal (a 10th-century Arab Muslim writer) knew Dehistan only as a minor settlement on the seacoast inhabited by fishermen.

The center of this district or ruztaq was the town of Akhur, situated on the right-hand side of a road that went toward the ribat at the frontier; the minaret of Akhur was visible from far away. The ribat used to be surrounded by a wall, but even by Maqdisi's (a medieval Arab geographer) time it had been demolished on the order of the government, and the former frontier outpost became a

peaceful, flourishing settlement. Many bazaars and mosques were to be found there; from among the latter, Maqdisi singles out the old mosque with wooden columns and another with a minaret; this mosque was, in contrast to the rest, not of the Hanafi but of the Shafie' school. Until the question of how much the eastern shoreline of the Caspian Sea has

changed in the course of the last millennium is answered, we shall not be able to pinpoint the whereabouts of this frontier outpost of Muslim territory.

Historical sources about this area are exceedingly scant; we do not know when Dehistan ceased to exist and when the last vestiges of Persian culture and urban civilization disappeared from here. There are traces along the Atrak (a fast-moving river which begins in the mountains of northeastern Iran) of an extensive irrigation system, but contemporary explorers such as Poslavskaia admit the possibility of artificial irrigation here only under the condition that sometime in the past there used to be in the Atrak, Sumbar, and Chandyr rivers incomparably more water than today, and that the water did not have the bitter-salty taste it has now.

A change in the course of the Atrak is also assumed on the basis of the site of a city whose ruins are known by the name of Mashhad-e Misriyan, that is, "place of the martyrdom of the Egyptians" (on maps it often appears as Mastorian). These ruins were described at the beginning of the 1830s by the traveler A. Conolly, and in greater detail, together with a plan, by A. M. Konshin. The city occupied an area of 120 desiatinas [that is, 324 acres], and was surrounded by a pentagonal wall built from fired brick, with bastions on its southern side.

The above is a lightly edited version of chapter entitled 'Qumis and Gorgan', from a book entitled, 'An Historical Geography of Iran', written by W. Barthold and published by Princeton University Press, Princeton.

▲ Ancient city of Dehistan, now in the Balkan region of western Turkmenistan
● orientmice.com

