

Suleiman Prison: A mysterious natural wonder and historical enigma

Iranica Desk

Did you know that one of the scariest prisons in the world is located near the city of Takab in West Azarbaijan Province? It is called Suleiman Prison, where the Prophet Suleiman used to imprison disobedient demons. Even today, the piercing screams echo from the mountain's mouth, and their breaths escape from the abyss within the mountain. Suleiman Prison is actually a natural wonder, a mountain located about three kilometers west of Takht-e Suleiman. It is approximately 300 kilometers from Urmia, and 40 kilometers from Takab. Suleiman Prison is situated in a beautiful valley that belongs to the third geological period. This mountain, which is considered one of the natural and historical attractions of West Azarbaijan Province, attracts a large number of tourists every year. At first glance, this mountain, with its hollow and conical shape, appears quite terrifying. It has held special significance throughout history due to its deep cavity and the presence of a well. If you climb up this mountain, you will come face to face with a very deep and scary hole at its mouth, and looking down toward its bottom will make you dizzy. Over thousands of years, the



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cavity inside the mountain has been formed by mineral deposits in water. The mountain has an elevation ranging from 87 to 108 meters, but the deep cavity inside it has expanded to approx-

imately 80 meters in height, and a mouth with an approximate diameter of 65 meters. According to researchers, the prison was a sacred sanctuary during the 1st millennium BCE. It is highly likely that it was developed in the 7th century BCE and took the form of a strong fortress. It appears that this construction process was carried out rapidly, as the box-shaped feature in the northern part seems short and superficial, suggesting it was built without sufficient precision. Historians believe that the reason for this haste was the imminent threat from the Assyrians and Urartians.

The director general of the province's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization stated, based on studies conducted by Iranian and German archaeologists, that there are two types of architecture in the prison. He explained that the first type is associated with a sacred complex comprising 63 rooms, constructed around the peak at an altitude of 85 meters. In the southern foothills of the mountain, there is a staircase that leads to a terrace and ultimately a sanctuary. This sanctuary represents one of the most notable architectural remnants of this complex. Researchers believe that these artifacts were constructed in the first millennium BCE and during a later period, it is likely that this site lost its value due to the decline of the spring's water, transforming into a settlement complex.

Borzouyeh Javani, an expert from West Azarbaijan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, stated that in recent years, various artifacts such as jars and kitchen ceramics have been unearthed from the prison. The discovery of a scattered skeleton, along with several war weapons like an axe head during the excavations, further supports the likelihood that this settlement was abandoned due to invasions and destruction. In one of the excavations from the eastern slope of the moun-

tain, a partially broken jug was unearthed, inside of which the preserved body of a child was discovered. The presence of this ancient jug signifies the age-old history of Suleiman Prison, dating back thousands of years. It was customary in prehistoric times to place deceased children inside such jugs and then bury them. After examining its prominent natural features, Suleiman Prison was registered as the first natural heritage of West Azarbaijan Province on Iran's National Heritage List in March 2001. This historical mountain was also inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List on July 5, 2003.

In the mountains, there is a deep black hole which has no way out, and if you step into it, you will certainly lose your life. The indigenous people of this region believe that Prophet Suleiman used this abyss to imprison disobedient demons - a prison with high walls that completely confined the demons. They say that the stone structure on top of the hill was also built to protect this prison.

The rocks constituting volcanic mountains with a crater at their summit, from which smoke rises, are of igneous and metamorphic origin; however, it is worth noting that the type of rock used in Suleiman Prison is sedimentary. Based on the observations of scientists in this mountain and its surrounding areas, it appears that the cone-shaped structure, which is currently empty of water, located at the mouth of the hill, was filled with water about 2,000 years ago.

The remains of the water reservoirs around the cone also indicate the unusable nature of the water in this cavity and the lake inside it. In fact, it can be said that a small spring has contributed to the formation of this tall mountain, and no sea or other agent has played a role in the formation of the mountain. This spring initially led to the formation of a lake similar to Takht-e-Suleiman Lake. It was full of mineral salts, lime, and sulfur. It should be noted that this mountain has an

underground connection with Takht-e-Suleiman Lake. Multiple hot springs can be seen around this mountain, which are rich in mineral salts. They have even caused changes in the col-

or and shape of the surrounding lands. Some of these springs have a constant amount of water, and it is only the pressure of gas that causes them to bubble in such a way that, at first glance, one may think that water is flowing out of these springs regularly. But that's not the case.

Capturing the unparalleled nature surrounding the mountain, hiking and enjoying the natural landscapes, as well as its proximity to Takht-e Suleiman, a UNESCO World Heritage site, have led to a large number of tourists visiting this mysterious area every year. So, if you are adventurous, one who enjoys exploring natural wonders, you are highly recommended to visit the prison during your trip to West Azarbaijan Province.

You can visit the region at any time of the year, but most tourists choose the spring and early summer seasons to travel to this area. This is because during this time of year, West Azarbaijan Province is at its most picturesque state, with lush green nature.

Although autumn lacks the joy and freshness of flowers, it presents a magical and distinct image of this area with its adornment of yellow, red, and orange colors. Visiting Suleiman Prison in winter is not recommended due to the cold weather.



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