

# Discovery of a mysterious hand-carved structure near Rudkhan Castle

## A tunnel or natural cave?

### Iranica Desk

Rudkhan Castle is a brick and stone medieval structure in Gilan Province. It is a military complex constructed during the Sassanid era (224-651 CE), and later rebuilt during the Seljuq era.

Head of Gilan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization Vali Jahani said a mysterious structure has recently been discovered near the castle, potentially serving as a part of a tunnel, or an entrance to the fortress itself, or perhaps a natural or manmade cave, ISNA reported.

However, experts have stated that further, more detailed archaeological investigations are required before reaching a definitive conclusion.

According to Jahani, Rudkhan Castle is one of the remarkable wonders harboring numerous hidden secrets within its core. This astonishing fortress is located on the summit of a mountain, approximately 20 kilometers from the city of Fuman.

Previous exploratory surveys conducted in the eastern and western sides of the mountain summit revealed the presence of guards responsible for protecting this fortress. Although the cemetery of the fortress remains undiscovered, archaeologists strive to unravel the hidden mysteries of this beautiful structure. Jahani mentioned that during



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the examination of the surrounding area, researchers stumbled upon an entirely concealed, peculiar structure hid-

den beneath dense vegetation and trees. This enigmatic structure is not directly related to Rudkhan Castle, and what is ev-



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ident is that it likely served as a dedicated outpost for the skilled forces under the command of the fortress.

He added that this structure and the guard who was present inside it seems to have had close connections with the fortress,

constantly monitoring and relaying information about any potential enemy attacks.

According to Jahani, the features of the structure suggest it may have been larger in size. The floor reveals visible evidence of lime mortar and hand-crafted soil, creating a mosaic-like pattern. The mouth of the structure spans around six square meters, with a depth of approximately four meters. These details raise questions about its original function and how it fits into the historical context of the region.

Rudkhan Castle's strategic location, surrounded by a river and dense forests, has made it an impregnable stronghold throughout history. The use of strong materials such as brick, stone, wood, mortar, and lime in its construction, coupled with its unique architecture, further fortified its defenses against enemy forces. It is no wonder that it has earned a place on Iran's National Heritage List.

As we delve deeper into the rich history and architectural wonders of Iran, Rudkhan Castle stands as a testament to the country's vast cultural heritage. Exploring the ancient walls and forts that have withstood the test of time offers a fascinating glimpse into the architectural ingenuity and historical depth present in this remarkable structure.

## Evolution of artistic innovations in bronze articles and architectural epigraphy

The appearance of living creatures on bronze articles constitutes an evident innovation, insofar as there is a large group of bronze articles dating from the end of the 11th centuries from the eastern regions of Iran (possibly from Khorasan in the first instance), which are decorated only with geometrical ornament of circles and dots.

At the outset there are no inscriptions on pieces in this group. Arabic inscriptions only appear at a later stage. In actual fact, only one scoop of this type is known, but its ornament of circles and dots no longer plays an independent role, serving only to fill in the background to the inscription, which associates this scoop with another group of bowls, since they also have a similar background to several inscriptions.

This fact attests to the geographical proximity of the two groups in question. Thus, around the end of the 10th century the number of items with geometrical ornamentation decreases and items appear with inscriptions.

A group of bronze items, consisting of bowls and trays, was

manufactured in Mavera al-Nahr (Central Asia). It should be mentioned here because it undergoes changes over the course of the 11th century: the bowls become more massive, the background ornament to the inscriptions becomes finer and the character of the script changes slightly. However, there are no depictions of living creatures on items of this group during the 10th and 11th centuries. It is essential to point out one general feature of all three groups of bronze articles produced in neighbouring areas during the 10th and 11th centuries and that is the absence of inlay. Inlay appears on Iranian (Khorasan) items only in the 11th century and flourishes magnificently during the 12th century. This fact also supports the proposed periodic classification.

Early pieces inlaid with copper and silver – such as the figure of an eagle dating from 180 AH (796-797 CE), or the ewer from Svaneti, and other objects of the 7th-9th centuries – if associated with Iranian territory, are more likely to have come from its western

rather than eastern regions, but they were probably manufactured somewhere in Iraq, the centre of the Caliphate.

The absence of precisely dated examples hinders any assessment of changes in ceramics and textiles, and in this instance archaeological methods do not provide the necessary precision. The question of a periodic classification for architecture has concerned scholars for a long time. During the 11th and 12th centuries great changes can be observed in architectural epigraphy. In the 11th century, the Kufic script becomes more complicated and the so-called "plaited" Kufic makes its appearance.

It is possible that the first examples in architecture are to be assigned to the early 11th century (for example, at Rabati Malik), although in ceramics "plaited" Kufic script is already well represented in the 10th century. At the same time naskhi writing begins to be used as a monumental script. It has also been established that during the 11th century specific types of mosque, madreseh (mosque school)

and minaret became prevalent throughout Iran, though these types were not genuinely new but had already been developed during the preceding ages. In the sphere of architectural decor much that is new emerges in the 11th century, and frequently these innovations occur during the period preceding the creation of the great Seljuk empire.

It has been suggested that radical changes took place in art with the consolidation of Seljuk power.

But as we have attempted to show, these changes were already perceptible much earlier, before the founding of the Seljuk state in eastern Iran. The Seljuks' contribution to art appears to have been very small; it is even difficult to speak of the Seljuk sultans' patronage of art as their dynasty never founded a permanent capital city which would have become a centre for the artistic movements of the period.

The changes in Persian art coincide chronologically with the Seljuk conquest, but it is necessary to seek the cause of these changes in the life of the Iranian cities where



▲ A bowl dating back to late 12th century

craftsmen and artists congregated. But by founding an empire from the Amu Darya (Oxus) River to the Mediterranean, the Seljuks furthered the spread of Persian art to the west.

A large number of Iranian

craftsmen moved to Iraq and Anatolia in the 11th and 12th centuries and collaborated in the creation of a new style in these areas (another group of craftsmen went to the western regions a little later, at the time of the Mongol invasion).

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.