

Rostam Giv Cistern, a historical marvel in Yazd

Iranica Desk

The Rostam Giv Cistern, known as Ab Anbar-e Rostam Giv in Persian, is situated in the city of Yazd, in the central province of Yazd. Built in 1941, it is a nationally registered attraction and is renowned for its charming brick dome accompanied by four tall windcatchers. The intricate brickwork decorations visible in the windcatchers and throughout the water reservoir serve as prominent and undeniable examples of ancient and beautiful Iranian architecture, captivating every tourist.

Located in the Zoroastrian neighborhood of the city, at the corner of Mehr Alley on the outskirts of Basij Boulevard, the Rostam Giv Cistern benefits from a convenient location for attracting tourists and visitors.

Water storage is crucial for residents of water-scarce areas, and ancestors addressed this issue by constructing structures like the Rostam Giv Cistern. These structures can be seen as examples of the art and innovation of ancient people. Often built in a concealed manner, sometimes underground, they would fill up with rainwater or streams in different seasons, playing a significant role in providing water for the people in these areas.

In the past, water reservoirs were divided into two types: public and private. The first type was usually a single building in neighborhoods and caravanserais along caravan routes, while the second type was built within personal homes based on the homeowner's income and financial ability. They consisted of various parts, including water storage, a cover for concealing the source, windcatchers, stairs, distribution channels, and an entrance adorned with the architecture of that era.

The cisterns in Yazd, due to the warm climate of the province, feature several



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wind catchers on top of them. Most of these structures have two wind catchers, but some of them were built with four, five, and even six wind catchers, depending on their size and extent. Other notable features of these buildings include domed ceilings constructed using bricks and clay. The domed ceilings, in-

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tegrated wind catchers, multiple stairs used to access the water gathering area, and the decorative elements, often in the form of brickwork, are prominent examples of Iranian architecture that have been preserved for future generations.

It is interesting to note that there are more than 60 cisterns in Yazd Province, most of which have been registered as national historical sites.

History

Rostam Giv Cistern is one of the several water reservoirs built in Yazd. According to historical documents, it was



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constructed in the early years of World War II in 1940, and its construction took about two years. Apparently, the architecture of the Rostam Giv Cistern was overseen by Haji Mohammad Ebrahim Khorramshahi. The restoration and renovation plan of the Rostam Giv Cistern, as one of the historical buildings

of Yazd, was implemented by the city's municipality in 2018. This historical site was registered as one of Iran's national monuments in 1996. Due to the drying of the qanats, this water reservoir is devoid of water; the water for the houses is supplied from the city's pipeline system.

Architecture

The Rostam Giv Cistern is situated on layers of clay soil, and its dome is designed in the shape of a turnip, adorned with a beautiful cypress pattern using bricks. Adjacent to it are four tall, four-sided wind towers, also embellished with intricate brickwork decorations. The cistern boasts a large cylindrical tank capable of holding approximately 2,300 cubic meters of water, with a mouth diameter of 14 meters and a depth of 15 meters. The construction of this building utilized Sarouj bricks, known for their durability.

The cypress pattern on the dome symbolizes eternity. An interesting feature of the Rostam Giv Cistern is the incorporation of two separate mouths for use by Zoroastrians and Muslims, situated in neighborhoods two kilometers apart from each other. In a land where water holds immense importance, neither Zoroastrians nor Muslims are willing to allocate water exclusively for themselves. The presence of water has been a unifying factor among people in various neighborhoods of Iranian cities.

Fortunately, the Rostam Giv Cistern has been restored and is well-maintained. When visiting, it is important to ensure the protection and preservation of this historical site. Visiting this water reservoir, especially at sunset, promises to be a truly enjoyable experience. Please note that the cistern is closed, and access to its interior space is not possible.

Persian art scholarship in early 20th-century Poland

Newly independent and confident, early 20th-century Poland increased its scholarly activity, including research on Oriental art. The growth of Polish scholarship in Persian art reflected a general current in international art history and museology. In the wake of the landmark exhibition and international congress on Persian art, especially the London Burlington House exhibition of Persian art in 1931 that served as a point of reference for a series of similar events worldwide, Poland also organized its first exhibition of Persian art in Warsaw four years later, in 1935. Organized jointly by the Polish Society of Fine Arts and the Polish-Iranian Society, it exhibited 281 items, mainly arms and armour, manuscripts, carpets and textiles from local collections. Apart from its large scale by the Central European standard, the importance of this exhibition lies in the fact that most of the exhibits were destroyed or disappeared during the following decade. The exhibition was accompanied by a handbook which emphasised the impact of Persian art on Polish culture.

Independence generated a far-reaching intellectual and scientific revival during the interwar period. The main centres of Oriental studies were established at Lwów, Warsaw, Kraków and Wilno (now Vilnius, Lithuania). Literature and

philology were particularly important fields of research, with Ananiasz Zajęczkowski (1903-1970) and Franciszek Machalski (1904-1979) as the leading exponents. Persian art studies had reached maturity with the publication of Tadeusz Makowski's (1878-1956) pioneering essays, which were based on years of extensive archival research in Islamic art in Poland in the 17th and 18th centuries. These postulate that the nobility of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth came increasingly under the influence of neighbouring Muslim territories, and developed a strong affinity for Persian visual culture, to the extent that the latter began to overshadow the West European outlook of Poland.

While Makowski did not emphasise manuscripts and their literary contents, he set the standard for Polish research on the arts of Islam, also giving impulse for further investigations into Persian art of both pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. Makowski was a specialist of the "Sarmatian" culture and art of his native Lwów. Yet his main contribution to the Polish scholarship of Persian art was clearly his link with the international scholarly community.

In the Survey of Persian Art, edited by Arthur Upham Pope (1881-1969) and Phyllis Ackerman (1893-1977), he contributed an essay to the chapter of carpets, together with Pope

and Heinrich Jacoby (1889-1964), demonstrating his reputation as an expert of Persian carpets within the international Islamic art community at that time. At the same time the art historian and keeper Stefan Saturnin Komornicki (1887-1942) published the first scientific description of manuscript painting from the Princes Czartoryski Library in 1935. In this work, he made comparisons between various paintings in the collection, discussing their stylistic connections, and suggesting attributions to particular schools or artists. Based on the comparative method, his stylistic analysis is thorough and comprehensive, and what is unique is that this method was developed independently from the almost contemporaneous Persian Miniature Painting (1933) by Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray, which became the standard monograph in the western scholarship of Persian painting. Compared to this catalogue-style book, often abbreviated "BWG," Komornicki's work is more meticulous in certain aspects, chiefly because of its relatively narrow scope that made it possible to have a careful look at details, such as iconography and composition.

Despite a potential as a leading centre of Persian and Islamic art studies in Central Europe in terms of collections and researchers, the pre-war scholarly movement was tragically



▲ Garden carpet, National Museum in Krakow, Poland

interrupted after 1939. Many Persian works of art disappeared from the Polish collections or dispersed, and it took several decades to resume systematic research, based on pre-war results.

Nevertheless, the history of collecting and studying Persian manuscripts in Poland presents a continuous growth of interest from mediaeval times to recent times. Beginning with trade contacts, the knowledge of Persian arts devel-

oped from a taste for material culture and fashion towards the sphere of the written word. This later phase, in turn, was born as a more or less amateurish literary interest, typical of the early 19th century, but matured into a more professional and scholarly approach promoted by the development of Persian studies in the early 20th century. Persian manuscript collections are therefore the physical vestiges of these intellectual developments in Poland.