

Baladeh Qanat: A historical water system in South Khorasan Province



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Iranica Desk

The use of qanats for water supply in Iran dates back to the first millennium BCE. Due to low precipitation in Iran, the construction of qanats allowed farmers to bring water from underground springs through channels from the foothills to the surface during times when surface water was not available for daily use and agriculture.

Baladeh Qanat is one of the oldest qanats in Iran, located in South Khorasan Province, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is still active today, providing a significant portion of the water needed for agricultural lands, and is also considered a tourist attraction in Ferdows, a historical city dating back to the third millennium BCE.

Baladeh Qanat is approximately 200 kilometers northwest of Birjand, the capital of South Khorasan Province. It is among the remaining Iranian qanats from the Sassanid period, which, along with 10 others, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List on July 14, 2016. The 11 qanats, with a history ranging from

200 years to over 3,000 years, and meeting UNESCO's criteria, are recognized as the 20th registered heritage site from Iran. With its complex technology, Baladeh Qanat represents an important stage in human history and serves as evidence of a cultural tradition dating back to around 2,000 years ago.

All 11 qanats listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List are distinguished by their unique architecture, depth, and other characteristics. These qanats are located in the provinces of Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan, Yazd, Kerman, and Markazi.

Zarch Qanat, spanning a history of 2,000 to 3,000 years, and stretching over 71 kilometers, stands out as one of the tallest qanats in Iran. Qasabeh Qanat, tracing its origins back to the Achaemenid era, holds the title of the deepest qanat.

Historical records indicate that Baladeh was initially governed by the Medes. The city of Ferdows has long been renowned for its qanats and subterranean aqueducts. While the precise date of Baladeh Qanat's construction remains uncertain, ev-

idence suggests that it was excavated during the Sassanid period. Some sources and historical investigations imply the presence of pottery near Baladeh Qanat, indicating its construction occurred 500 years after the Qasabeh Qanat in Gonabad.

Baladeh Qanat may resemble a conventional water structure, yet the specialized technical expertise applied in its design has ensured its preservation to this day, supplying water for the irrigation of gardens and farmlands in Ferdows. This qanat orchestrates a sophisticated water distribution network by harnessing surface waters from nearby valleys. In the past, water from this qanat was stored in reservoirs to allow sedimentation, serving as a vital water source for the city of Ferdows.

Structures erected atop water reservoirs or ponds in arid regions feature domed or arched configurations, often incorporating multiple entrances leading to staircases for accessing these reservoirs. The water volume in Baladeh Qanat has been significant; hence, in the past, the water was directed into two parts

and two channels to benefit more people. Despite the challenges of living in these conditions, desert dwellers would allocate half of their water rights. Experts in water distribution and channel maintenance, known as *kiyal* and *jooyban*, were compensated and entrusted with the full-time oversight of these channels.

Water from Baladeh Qanat flows into a main channel and then divides into two smaller streams. This qanat plays a crucial role in providing water to the gardens and agricultural lands of the villages of Baghestan Aliya, Solfi, and the city of Eslamieh.

Approximately three years ago, a route was established to allow tourists to explore and appreciate the engineering intricacies of Baladeh Qanat. This route enables visitors to explore the underground and internal spaces of the qanats. Moreover, in the vicinity of the Baladeh Qanat complex and in the villages of Eslamieh, Baghestan Aliya, in Ferdows, there are eco-lodges such as Shams Emareh, Babashabnam, and Sharifi, where you can plan your stay.

Splendor of Mir Mosque in Natanz

Natanz, a picturesque city nestled in Isfahan Province and renowned as a garden city, boasts a rich tapestry of historical landmarks, many of which are proudly listed on the prestigious Iran National Heritage List. Among these treasures stands the magnificent Mir Mosque of Natanz, a site brimming with distinctive embellishments and architectural allure.

Located on Malik Ashtar St. within the charming confines of "Mir Alley," this mosque traces its origins back to the illustrious late Seljuk era, earning its

designation as a national heritage site in 1934. A grand entrance portal, crafted from sturdy bricks, welcomes visitors with a barrel-vault arch adorned with intricate plasterwork decorations and fading relief inscriptions, bearing witness to the passage of time and the elements, destinationiran.com wrote.

The mosque's entrance is flanked by two false arches on separate floors, with the upper arch now in a state of disrepair. Inside, additional brick false arches serve as niches, enhancing the

architectural grandeur of the interior. A corridor leads to a square-shaped *shabestan* (prayer hall), partitioned by columns into nine sections, each supporting a uniform dome atop broad square columns.

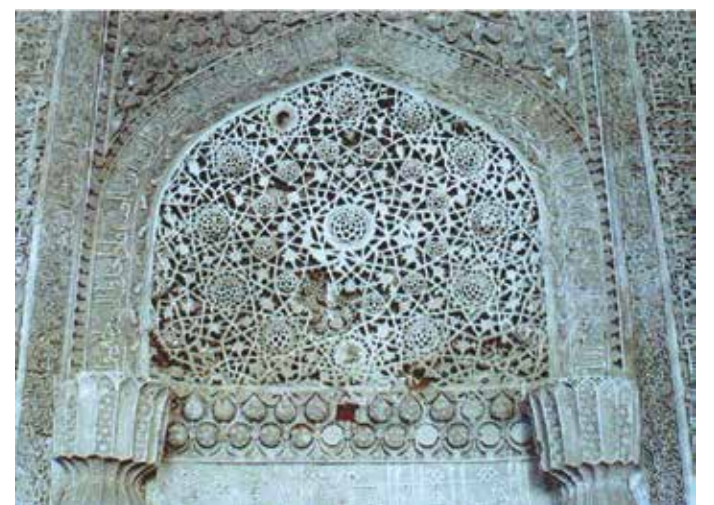
Adjacent to this hall lies a vestibule connecting to a subterranean prayer area, added in recent times to augment the mosque's spiritual sanctity. A defining feature of the Mir Mosque is its dual mihrabs, with the primary altar from the late Seljuk and early Timurid era, standing at an impressive height of

approximately 84cm. Elaborate plasterwork, floral motifs, and refined Arabesque designs grace the altar, complemented by Quranic inscriptions in thuluth script.

Evidences within the mosque hint at a bygone era when the structure may have encompassed two stories, notably showcased by a secondary mihrab perched atop the main one. Despite weather-induced degradation, including the erosion of parts and inscriptions, the enduring charm of the Mir Mosque beckons visitors to delve into

its storied past and architectural opulence.

While the ravages of time have taken their toll on certain sections, the Mir Mosque remains a cherished historical gem in Natanz, beckoning both local and global travelers to behold its unique splendor. A journey to Natanz, whether as part of an Iran tour package or personal pilgrimage, promises a glimpse into a bygone era and the architectural marvels that continue to captivate visitors from far and wide.



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