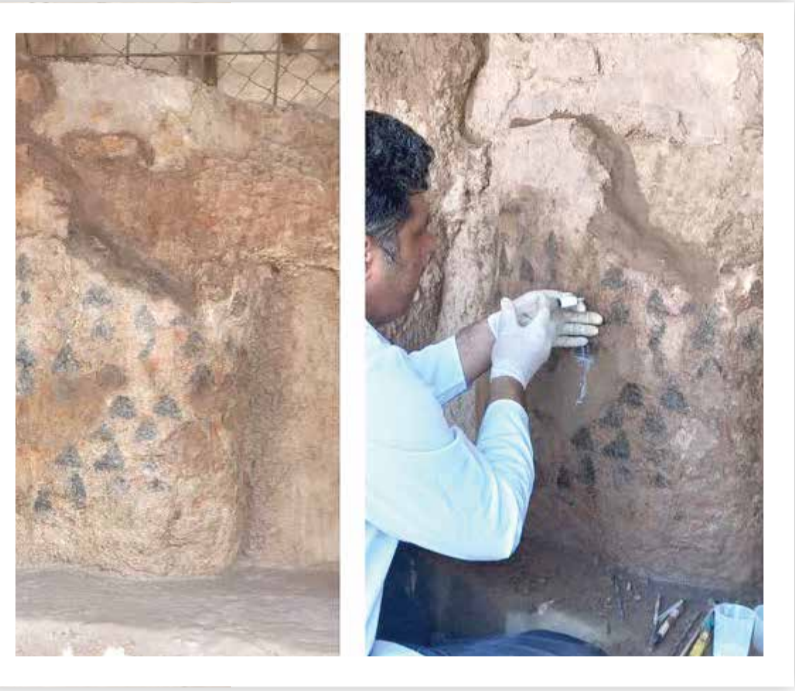


Ancient clay bas-relief restored in Jiroft



● MEHR

Iranica Desk

The ancient clay bas-relief discovered during the excavations carried out in Jiroft, Kerman Province, in the 2000s, has undergone restoration. Fathollah Niazi, an expert at the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage & Tourism, who restored the bas-relief, mentioned that the artifact, unearthed by a team led by Youssef Majidzadeh, is one of the oldest from around 5,000 years ago. He further stated that due to inadequate maintenance and various damaging factors over

the years, a part of its upper section was lost. Necessary restoration work has been completed on this valuable artifact, including cleaning, layer removal, strengthening, and stabilization. The upper part of the bas-relief was intentionally not reconstructed to maintain the authenticity of the artifact, and the restoration was focused on the existing remains of the statue.

Niazi highlighted that the skirt of the bas-relief is adorned with black, red, and yellow pigments in geometric patterns. Additionally, more plans have been made

for the preservation of this valuable artifact, which will soon be implemented in collaboration with the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Department of Kerman Province. Seyyed Sajjadi, an archaeologist who resumed excavations at this ancient site after a 16-year hiatus, previously expressed concerns about the deteriorating condition of the bas-relief. He emphasized that during the years of neglect, irreparable damage had been inflicted upon it. Sajjadi noted that the site had been neglected without any restoration efforts.

Youssef Majidzadeh, an archaeologist who conducted excavations in Jiroft and Konar Sandal Hill in Kerman Province in the 2000s, provided insights into this sculpture. He described it as a prominent clay relief depicting a man with a patterned skirt, holding his hands clasped in front of his chest. The discovery of this bas-relief suggests that the site was once a hub for governmental activities like administration, storage, and guarding. The upper part of the bas-relief has suffered damage due to erosion and weather conditions, leaving only two arms and a tri-

angular-patterned skirt intact at the lower end.

According to Majidzadeh, the available documents, the richness of its artworks, and their quantity and quality indicate that the Halil Rud area, where Konar Sandal is located, was the largest industrial-commercial center in the ancient East in the early third millennium BCE, specializing in the production and export of goods made from various types of soapstone and marble.

The extensive destruction in the area has forced them to prioritize restoration efforts before proceeding with further excava-

tions. The history of this ancient area, located near the city of Jiroft in southern Kerman Province, dates back 4,600 years and holds significant cultural heritage value. Despite its historical significance, Jiroft was relatively unknown in terms of archaeology until 2001, when it suddenly became one of the most important archeological sites in West Asia. Most of the excavated sites at Konar Sandal used few stones and metals, while materials like brick and clay were employed more. If not addressed, these structures would be damaged by weather changes, wind, and rain.

Revival of khersak-weaving, an economic opportunity for Semnan Province

Iranica Desk

In Semnan province, traditional hand-woven textiles such as rugs, *ja-jim*, and *khersak* have been prevalent for centuries, each carrying a remarkable essence of artistic craftsmanship. Khersak is a type of rug crafted from sheep's wool, showcasing a palette of seven natural hues.

Khersak-bafi (khersak-weaving), an ancient art rooted in Aftar village within the city of Sorkheh, has been predominantly practiced by skilled women, who intricately weave original and captivating patterns.

Khersak is meticulously woven using wool, hands, and tools, with each piece reflecting the artisan's flair and imaginative prowess, setting it apart from its mass-produced counterparts.

The name khersak derives from the rug's plush texture, boasting a pile reaching nearly 2 to 2.5 centimeters in height, maintaining its length post-weaving, akin to the thickness and softness of a bear's skin (*khers* means bear in Persian).

Khersak-weaving is listed on Iran's National Heritage List. Aftari women have revitalized the production of these woolen rugs by establishing multiple workshops in the village.

Sakineh Hamidi is one of the artists in the village who has set up a small khersak-weaving workshop in her home. She mentioned, "We used to weave khersak rugs since childhood, but over the past 30 years, this tradition, which was part of our culture, was forgotten. However, in recent years, we have returned to kher-

sak-weaving, and I established a workshop."

As the name implies, these rugs are a type of carpet that, like other types of rugs, has its own unique weaving and production methods. They come in various sizes, ranging from 1.5 to 2 square meters, and are commonly used as floor coverings, particularly during the winter season. Even the elders in Aftar used to place khersak on the painful area during backaches, bone pains, and rheumatism to warm it up and alleviate the pain.

The thickness of the wool used in khersak-weaving limits the intricacy of these rugs. Khersak rugs are known for their high durability, attributed to the various wool knots woven within them. The pile of these rugs is reversible, allowing them to easily absorb moisture. Primarily falling under the category of handicrafts, these rugs are predominantly woven by artists from various cities in Semnan Province as well as Arak, Mashhad, and the Bakhtiari tribes.

A fascinating aspect of traditional khersak-weaving is the use of natural dyes such as walnut shells, barberry roots, and madder to color the wool, adding unique value to the rugs. Additionally, khersak weavers do not rely on patterns for weaving and instead memorize all the intricate designs.

With the support of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Semnan Province, several small khersak-weaving workshops have been established in the village in recent years. The younger generation is increasingly interested in learning this ancient art and tradition, eagerly

engaging in khersak-weaving with enthusiasm.

Handicrafts not only play a vital role in preserving identity and culture but also serve as a key driver for building a resistance economy. By increasing production and establishing robust sales channels for these products, a substantial portion of sustainable employment objectives, particularly in rural regions, can be met.

Of particular significance is the resurgence of individuals embracing their rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted history, leading to the revitalization of indigenous arts and the unlocking of numerous latent opportunities.

While it may appear initially that many traditional handicrafts have lost relevance in modern society, leveraging their designs and motifs alongside contemporary skills can lay the groundwork for the creation and advancement of indigenous handicrafts.

Providing adequate support to artists through low-interest loans, actively addressing barriers, offering educational programs, extending support services, attracting private sector investments, and fostering a culture that values handicrafts are key strategies that can contribute to the realization of sustainable economies, especially in rural areas.

Conversely, while many artists are exploring and engaging in new artistic disciplines, this pursuit, while commendable, can sometimes result in the production of substandard and non-indigenous art products. This trend has significantly impacted the decline of the local handicraft market, indicating the need for intervention in this aspect as well.



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