

Preservation of Hyrcanian forests is vital



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The Hyrcanian forests boast a unique ancient history, shaped by millennia of human settlement that has had a profound impact on its vegetation cover. With increased awareness and the implementation of proper management practices, the preservation of these forests is vital.

Friba Babaei, the head of the Hyrcanian World Heritage Site at the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization of Gilan Province, highlighted in a note that this natural wonder,

which has evolved over several million years, was officially recognized as the second natural heritage site in Iran by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee on July 10, 2019. This significant designation took place during the 43rd session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Baku, Azerbaijan, chtn.ir wrote. Azerbaijan's Hirkan Forest has been included in the United Nations' list of Natural World Heritage sites as an extension of Iran's Hyrcanian Forests. This decision was made during the 45th session of the World Her-

itage Committee held in Saudi Arabia. With this endorsement, the unique and diverse landscape of the Hyrcanian Forests, renowned for their distinct features, is now fully represented and protected.

This valuable heritage, with its globally distinctive natural features, also boasts a unique ancient history. Situated between the Alborz Mountains to the south and the Caspian Sea to the north, the Hyrcanian region enjoyed a warm and humid climate during the last Ice Age, with only its highest peaks experiencing glaciation. The region's stable climate, extensive temperate forests, rich diversity of flora and fauna, and abundant water sources have rendered it an alluring destination and a secure sanctuary for human settlement. Consequently, this area stands as a significant hub for early human dispersal.

According to numerous archaeologists, coastal areas have always held significant importance for human communities. This significance heightened after the extinction of large



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animals, with rising sea levels approximately 7,000 years ago shifting the focus of hunter-gatherer societies towards coastal regions. Despite this trend, many ancient sites have been unearthed at considerable distances from the coastline due to various factors. These factors encompass notable fluctuations in the Caspian Sea's water levels, the presence of marshy lands unsuitable for habitation during the Stone Age epoch, and dense forests that limited light penetration at the forest floor.

component of the Achaemenid Empire during the Persian Empire's reign. Records of Hyrcania's conquest are absent, yet insights gleaned from the Bisotoun Inscription affirm its inclusion within Persian territories until 522 BCE.

The soldiers from Hyrcania were integral to a significant military force under King Xerxes in 480 BCE during the conflict with the Greeks. At that juncture, a contingent of Hyrcanian soldiers safeguarded the passes of the Cai'cus and Hermus valleys

in Asia Minor. In the era of the Persian Empire, a defensive barrier was erected to shield Hyrcania from the Central Asian nomadic tribes. Presently, the remains of this barrier, referred to as the "Alexander Wall," endure in the region north of the Gorgan River, superseding the defensive fortifications of the Achaemenid era.

Following the conquest by Alexander the Great, Hyrcania became part of the newly established Seleucid Empire. References to the Hyrcanians surface during the Battle of Gaugamela in October 1, 331 BCE, and in August of 329 BCE, following the demise of the last Iranian king, Darius III, numerous Iranian nobles sought refuge in Hyrcania and yielded to Alexander there.

In the context of the Parthian dominion, Hyrcania occupied a strategic position within the empire, bridging their territories and the steppe regions considered their homeland. Parthian rulers selected a city in Hyrcania for their summer residence.

The enduring legacy of settlement within the Hyrcanian region left a lasting imprint on its vegetation cover. Nonetheless,

vast expanses of these forests remained untouched until the early nineteenth century. Subsequently, a surge in deforestation and industrial activities ensued, leading to the shrinking of this precious natural expanse to just over one million hectares today.

Numerous threats continue to imperil the Hyrcanian forests, underscoring the necessity for heightened awareness and efficacious implementation of preservation and management approaches to curb further degradation.

Pahlavi inscriptions at the ancient site of Haraskan decoded



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The original identity and translation of the Pahlavi inscriptions at the ancient site of Haraskan in Isfahan Province have been unveiled, according to Mohammad Javad Abdoli, head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Aran and Bidgol.

Abdoli explained that the restoration and cleaning of historical plaster artifacts for display in Vigol's newly established museum have uncovered the mystery of an ancient city that had been buried under sand for approximately 600 years, revealing its ancient name, as reported by chtn.ir. He elaborated that, based

on the Pahlavi inscription found on the plaster seats discovered in the fire temple at this site, which was studied and interpreted by a linguist from the University of Tehran, the city's name during the Sassanid era was Faraskan, which later evolved into Haraskan during the early Islamic period.

Abdoli also mentioned that, due to concerns about a road passing through the boundary of the Vigol ancient site, the cultural heritage site, in collaboration with the province's Cultural Heritage Organization, obtained permission from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts to conduct exploratory operations in the

area adjacent to the road. This investigation aims to determine the presence or absence of artifacts along the road's path, which will inform a final decision regarding the road's construction once the results are announced.

Vigol is a 120-hectare area located east of Bidgol, known for housing a fire temple with a history spanning several millennia. Although the ancient fire temple was discovered recently, ongoing research and archaeological studies have revealed a rich tapestry of life that has existed for thousands of years in the Aran and Bidgol regions. This fire temple has functioned continuously from pre-Islamic times through

various subsequent eras. Its historical significance dates back to the Sassanid Empire and extends into the early Islamic centuries, coinciding with the decline of the Seljuk period.

Architecturally, the fire temple features a cruciform design reminiscent of the "four-ivan" structures common in the Sassanid period, complete with four entrance doors. The central part of the building houses remnants of a fire pit, adorned with stucco decorations.

In summary, the Vigol fire temple is a remarkable example of ancient architecture and continuous cultural significance, capturing the essence of the region's long history.