

Archaeological insights from Bazeh Hur in Khorasan Razavi Province



Iranica Desk

Archaeologists, after seven seasons of excavation at the historical site of Bazeh Hur in Khorasan Razavi Province, have concluded that the discovered fire temple at this location is the largest and most significant fire temple in the northeastern cultural region of the Iranian Plateau during the pre-Islamic era. It is likely the same fire temple referred to in Sassanid religious and historical texts as Azar Barzin Mehr. The Bazeh Hur historical site, situated 75 kilometers southeast of Mashhad and adjacent to the village of Rabat-e Sefid, is recognized as

one of the most important Sassanid settlement sites. Covering an area of 20 hectares, Bazeh Hur comprises a settlement, a cemetery, and two groups of religious architecture, notably featuring a four-arch stone structure located at its northern edge. This structure was registered as the first listed monument of Khorasan on Iran's National Heritage List in 1931. Archaeological excavations that commenced in 2018 on the southern side of this site led to the identification of architectural remains of a Sassanid fire temple that remained active into the early Islamic period before being ultimately destroyed by a

significant earthquake.

The seventh season of excavation at the Bazeh Hur site has recently concluded, following a contract between the Cultural Heritage Research Institute and the University of Tehran's Department for Communication with Industry and Society. Meisam Labaf Khaniki, an associate professor in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Tehran and head of the Bazeh Hur archaeological team, discussed the results of this season's work. He noted that archaeological activities at this historical site since 2014 have uncovered valuable evidence related to archi-

tectural styles, decorations, pottery traditions, literature, and the practice of Zoroastrian rituals in Khorasan prior to the advent of Islam. In alignment with the defined objectives, this season's excavation aimed to address existing uncertainties regarding the quality of architectural decorations on the southern front of the Qaleh Dokhtar fire temple and to identify the nature of the architectural spaces adjacent to the fire temple. Labaf Khaniki stated that targeted excavations in specific workshops yielded valuable remnants of wall paintings, plasterwork, and figural ornaments found in their

original locations. These findings contribute significantly to our understanding of pre-Islamic art and architecture in eastern Iran and the decorative methods employed in religious architectural complexes. Furthermore, he mentioned that excavations in the workshops located within the enclosed area south of the fire temple provided valuable information about the quality of the surrounding wall architecture, the shape and function of architectural spaces, as well as a unique assemblage of pottery spanning from the Parthian period to the early Islamic era. Labaf Khaniki emphasized

that the seventh season of archaeological work at the historical site of Bazeh Hur has confirmed previous hypotheses, demonstrating that the uncovered fire temple is indeed the largest and most significant fire temple in the northeastern cultural region of the Iranian Plateau during the pre-Islamic era. This temple is likely the same one referred to in Sassanid religious and historical texts as Azar Barzin Mehr.

He concluded by stressing the extraordinary importance of this site in architectural history and the unique role of this fire temple in elucidating the social, political, and cultural history of Iran. Therefore, it is essential for relevant organizations and institutions to make timely decisions and implement practical measures to preserve and protect this invaluable historical site.

Role of traditional architecture in cultural heritage tourism

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Today, the tourism industry is recognized as one of the most significant sources of income globally and a crucial factor in fostering cultural exchanges among nations. Through various tourism activities, the economies of historical cities can be revitalized and reshaped. By focusing on sustainable practices, these historical centers can transform into valuable economic resources, benefiting both local communities and the wider society.

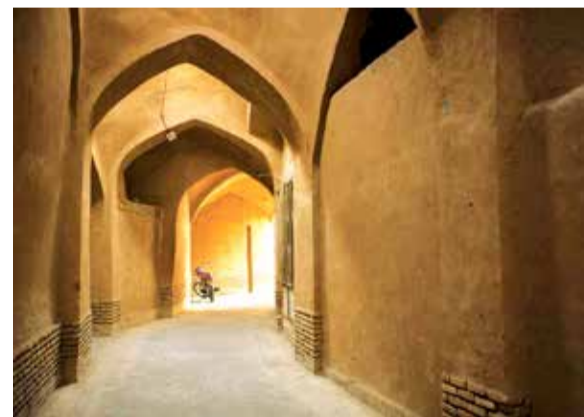
Tourism plays an essential role in many national and regional economies, particularly in less developed areas where it can drive development effectively. Historical cities and cultural heritage sites are especially significant in these regions, as archaeological sites and ancient buildings serve as primary attractions for international tourists. When these sites possess remarkable features, they can become global symbols, drawing visitors from around the world, chntn.ir wrote.

The architectural style of each region is intricately reflected in its buildings and urban planning. One of the most valuable aspects of any city is its tradition-



al fabric and architecture, which hold considerable cultural significance due to historical events, the residence of notable figures, and collective memories associated with specific architectural styles. With proper management and planning, these areas can be transformed into comprehensive destinations for cultural heritage tourism, offering visitors a rich experience of the local history and culture. In contemporary society, traditional architecture is receiving increasing attention as a vital component of cultural heritage. Evaluating and reconstructing traditional architectural forms while considering the requirements of modern life is crucial for preserving this

heritage. Valuing traditional architectural practices in the development of tourism destinations is one of the most effective ways to protect human heritage from the threats of degradation and loss. Cultural heritage showcases diverse aspects of human cultures and the legacies left by our ancestors. It serves as a mechanism for preserving social evolution and fostering a sense of global cohesion. Heritage encompasses customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions, and values that are essential for identity and self-awareness. Just as heritage has been passed down through generations, its benefits must be preserved for future generations.



Heritage embodies a sense of identity that promotes diversity among cultures, reflecting the uniqueness of humanity. It includes a blend of social and emotional elements along with various human activities. Cultural heritage can be divided into two interconnected categories: tangible and intangible heritage. Tangible heritage consists of physical elements that integrate with life and the environment, including buildings and sites such as temples, the Pyramids of Egypt, and public structures. Intangible heritage encompasses local features such as traditional crafts, cuisine, and unique cultural practices produced by indigenous communities. Historical artifacts and tan-

gible elements of cultural heritage represent significant historical and cultural events and are regarded as works of art. They express cultural viewpoints, values, beliefs, political ideas, customs, and traditions, reflecting the people, their culture, and their history. International tourism serves as a platform for showcasing diverse cultures, reflecting various lifestyles, beliefs, and values. A specific domain of tourism that encompasses cultural heritage is known as cultural heritage tourism. This form of tourism is defined as travel to visit historical sites, participate in local festivals, enjoy local arts and crafts, and engage in recreational activities. It includes various branches

such as religious tourism (visits to churches and monasteries), museum tourism (exploring museums), architectural tourism (visiting archaeological parks and museums), cave tours (in protected areas), and cultural tourism (engaging with traditions, culture, folklore, music, art, and architecture).

Cultural tourism, like heritage tourism, is regarded as a promising factor for economic development in tourist areas. The primary motivation for travel often stems from a desire to understand and appreciate culture and history, with traditional architecture serving as a key indicator of a community's heritage. The subject of architecture in tourism is explored under the term "architectural tourism." While there is no universally accepted definition, architectural tourism encompasses a wide range of applications of traditional architecture, primarily viewing it as an attraction for visitors.

With improved economic conditions and increased demand for food and clothing, the demand for tourism has also risen. Just as there are many products for food and clothing, numerous natural and human-made attractions exist for tourism. Architectural elements are

among the most sought-after items by tourists. Therefore, the quality of a city, region, or country's architecture must be carefully monitored and protected as part of cultural heritage tourism resources. Today, tourism based on architectural heritage has become one of the most popular forms of tourism, with countries worldwide embracing traditional architecture as a tool for economic development and support for local culture and heritage.

The phenomenon of vernacular architecture is a significant subject in aesthetics and philosophy, reflecting a deep respect for nature and the importance of introspection. Although vernacular architecture has undergone transformative changes throughout history, it has managed to maintain its unique identity, representing the customs, spirit, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, tastes, and artistic expressions of a community. What past architectural cultures held as tradition is often presented to us today as a lifeless form. Consequently, contemporary societies, in their pursuit of rediscovering and utilizing past values, are compelled to explore and recognize unfamiliar and forgotten values.