

Archaeological insights from Shahr-e Sukhteh



Iranica Desk

Shahr-e Sukhteh (Burned City), an ancient treasure located at the easternmost point of Iran, is poised for the resumption of a new season of archaeological excavations following 19 seasons of exploration.

Hossein Sarhaddi-Dadian, head of the Shahr-e Sukhteh World Heritage Site, informed ISNA that the excavations are currently on hold, with a new season yet to commence. Unfortunately, delays have been caused by funding challenges and administrative issues. However, the Cultural Heritage Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province is making significant efforts to continue the work.

"We held a meeting with the country's cultural heritage officials, and commitments were made to secure funding for the project. This funding is set to be included in the annual budget

program," Sarhaddi-Dadian stated, ISNA wrote.

He emphasized the social and cultural significance of Shahr-e Sukhteh, noting its location at Iran's easternmost point, bordering Afghanistan. This region is not only scientifically and research-wise important but also plays a crucial social and cultural role. Archaeological excavations instill a sense of pride and connection to heritage among local people. When the media discusses Shahr-e Sukhteh, the community feels that the area is vibrant and continues to hold importance, which can have positive psychological effects, helping address some of the social and economic issues in the region.

Sarhaddi-Dadian recalled that 19 seasons of excavations have been conducted in Shahr-e Sukhteh thus far, with six seasons carried out by Italian teams before the revolution, while



the remaining excavations were conducted by Iranian archaeologists under the supervision of Seyyed Mansour Seyyedsajadi. Despite these efforts, only about six to seven percent of this historical site has been identified.

Regarding the latest status of conservation and res-

toration efforts at Shahr-e Sukhteh, he explained that the site comprises various sections, including eastern and central residential areas, memorial structures, industrial zones, and a cemetery.

Given the possibility of rainfall in the last months of the

year, three sections requiring urgent restoration were prioritized. One of these was a burnt palace in the eastern residential area, the largest structure excavated by Italian archaeologists before the Islamic Revolution. Another selected area for restoration was the ceme-

tery, along with the northern part of the eastern area. These regions are among the oldest excavated parts that have not received adequate restoration for years. Shahr-e Sukhteh is located in Sistan and Baluchestan Province, along the road from Zahedan to Zabol. With a history of approximately 5,000 years, the ancient city is one of the most significant areas of ancient urbanization on the Iranian plateau. According to archaeological findings, Shahr-e Sukhteh was inhabited during four distinct periods. Researchers discovered that the city was abandoned about 1,900 years ago without any war or conflict, indicating a peaceful departure.

Excavations in the central part of the city suggest that the inhabitants gathered their belongings and left, though the reasons for this desertion remain unclear. Archaeologists consider this city, which had a com-

plete range of living tools approximately 5,000 years ago, to be one of the most advanced ancient cities in the world.

Significant artifacts uncovered from Shahr-e Sukhteh include a surgically altered skull of a 13-year-old girl, an artificial eye belonging to a woman aged approximately 28 to 32, made from a combination of natural bitumen, animal fat, and fine golden wires resembling capillaries; a 10-centimeter long ebony ruler measuring to a precision of one millimeter; a backgammon board made of ebony with 60 pieces; and a clay cup designed with an image of a moving goat, considered the oldest animation in the world. Shahr-e Sukhteh was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List as the 17th globally registered Iranian site during the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee held in Doha, Qatar, on June 22, 2014.

Enchantment of Vali Castle in Ilam

Vali Castle of Ilam, the capital city of Ilam Province, is one of the most stunning architectural examples from the Qajar period. Constructed in 1908 under the command of Gholamreza Vali Khan, it is situated in the Miankuhi plain, atop Choga Mirak hill in the Hossain Abad Fili district, covering an area of 2,500 square meters.

After the castle's completion, Gholamreza Khan

commissioned an inscription, 180cm long and written in Nastaliq script, to be engraved and placed above the eastern entrance. Unfortunately, this inscription fell during the Iran-Iraq war and is now housed in another part of the castle.

The castle features a large alcove on the north side, which is significantly bigger than the other rooms. At its center lies a small spring, originally adorned with

marble but later renovated with colorful tiles. The ceiling showcases exquisite mirror work, with some sections remaining intact on the western side, adding to the building's allure. Among the architectural highlights are lattice windows with colored glass, turquoise blue lattice brick fences, round columns, painted capitals, and decorative bow arches. The primary materials used in the

castle's construction are interconnected bricks and stones.

Vali Castle comprises five small and 20 large rooms, four porches, and two small terraces on the south side. Water is supplied through a spring using a traditional method, where spring water is channeled to the central courtyard via a water pipe.

Vali Castle was registered as a national historical site

in June 1997. It has since been converted into the Anthropology Museum, overseen by the Cultural Heritage Organization.

The museum showcases Ilam's customs, culture, tribes, and notable political and cultural figures through various sculptures. Today, the Anthropology Museum of Ilam is considered one of the richest specialized museums in the world. It is located in front

of the Cultural Heritage Organization on Pasdaran Street and is open to the public daily, except Fridays. Ilam, the capital of Ilam Province in western Iran, is known for its rich cultural heritage and stunning natural landscapes. Nestled in the Zagros Mountains, the region is characterized by its diverse ethnic communities, primarily comprising Kurds, Lors, and Persians. The cultural mosaic is re-

flected in the local traditions, music, and festivals. Ilam is also famous for its historical sites, including ancient ruins and traditional villages, which attract visitors interested in exploring the region's history and culture. The area's breathtaking scenery, with lush forests, rolling hills, and vibrant flora, makes it a popular destination for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts.

