

Mansour Castle bridges history, nature in Taleqan

Iranica Desk

Perched atop the towering cliffs of Taleqan in Iran's Alborz Province, Mansour Castle stands not only as a living testament to the architecture and lifeways of the past, but also as a multidimensional experience that blends history, culture, and nature. With its fortified walls, rock-carved cisterns, and sweeping vistas, the castle reflects the ingenuity and collective life of its former inhabitants, who endured the harsh conditions of the highlands. A visit to the site is a journey through both history and landscape, along a path that tells an unforgettable story. Alireza Tahmasebi, Head of the Taleqan Cultural Heritage and Tourism Department, described Mansour Castle as one of the region's most prominent heritage sites. "Its value is not limited to its historical architecture," he said. "This castle is part of the identity and collective memory of the local community. Every remaining stone, cistern, and wall narrates an era in which determined people stood firm against threats." Tahmasebi noted that the castle was officially registered on Iran's National Heritage List.

"This registration underscores the cultural and historical importance of the site," he added, "but listing is only the beginning of preservation, not the end." According to the official, efforts this year have focused on drafting a comprehensive research plan and implementing initial conservation measures. "Our goal is to preserve the site's authenticity while also harnessing its tourism potential," he said. One key initiative involves designing safe hiking routes equipped with visual guides, enabling visitors to engage with the historic site without risk, chtn.ir wrote. Addressing the challenges of conservation, Tahmasebi warned that tourism, while a valuable opportunity, can pose serious risks if left unmanaged. "Many visitors enter sensitive areas without awareness, move stones, or light fires. Such actions not only threaten the historical structure but also diminish the experience for others," he explained. Emphasizing the importance of public education, he added that installing informational signage, organizing specialized tours, and producing educational content play a vital role in raising



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awareness. "By creating these infrastructures, we aim to turn tourism into a responsible and sustainable platform." Regarding the future of tourism at Mansour Castle, Tahmasebi said the vision is to transform it into a major mountain-historical tourism hub in Alborz

Province. "This potential stems not only from its natural beauty, but also from its deep historical and cultural value. By integrating local oral histories, archaeological data, and careful planning, we can offer visitors a unique experience — one that connects them to the history,

culture, and nature of Taleqan." He concluded by describing Mansour Castle as a symbol of the intersection between history and nature, recalling a time when people lived deep in the mountains and overcame hardship through skill and resilience. "With the cooperation of

local communities and cultural heritage enthusiasts, we hope this site will gain greater visibility, allowing future generations to experience it as well." Climbing Mansour Castle is a cultural, historical, and spiritual experience. The ascent, the towering walls, carved cisterns, and breathtaking views together bear witness to the lives of people who embodied resilience. The castle serves as a bridge between past and future — one that allows visitors to touch history, breathe in the mist, watch light fall on stone, and return to modern life with a deeper understanding of the value of cultural heritage. If conservation, public education, responsible tourism management, and community participation are properly realized, Mansour Castle could become a successful model for integrating cultural heritage with sustainable tourism development. Today, history rests quietly in the mist and wind of Taleqan, waiting to be retold by future generations who understand the value of heritage not only in the past, but in its connection to today's environment and life.

Gilan's handicrafts gain international attention



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The deputy head of Gilan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization for handicraft affairs highlighted the rich diversity of traditional arts in the province, stating that Gilan's handicrafts — deeply rooted in local culture, lifestyle, and the natural environment — have attracted the attention of both domestic and international audiences. Mohammadreza Amirinejad said that despite certain limitations, particularly in suitcase exports to neighboring countries such as the Republic of Azerbaijan, Gilan's artisans and handicraft practitioners have continued to introduce and present their works beyond Iran's borders by relying on creativity, skill, and a deep cultural heritage, according to chtn.ir. He added that a wide range of Gilan's handicraft products has found its way to countries along the Caspian Sea and the

Persian Gulf region, especially Iraq. In some cases, thanks to the initiative and personal networks of artisans, these products have also been introduced to European markets. Amirinejad noted that Gilan's handicraft production includes a diverse array of traditional items such as Chadorshab textiles, Rashti embroidery, wicker weaving, bamboo crafts, kilims, mat weaving, pottery, and various wooden handicrafts — each reflecting the historical identity and inherited craftsmanship of the people of Gilan. Referring to export figures, he said that since the beginning of the current year, the value of handicrafts and traditional arts exports from Gilan Province has reached approximately \$385,000. He added that many handicraft products purchased by domestic customers are also taken abroad, indicating that the actual volume of exports is higher than officially recorded.

Artisans strive to preserve ancient Charoq craft in Zanjan Province

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The production of handicrafts in any region reflects the rich identity and culture of that area, and in Zanjan Province, a variety of enduring traditional arts are created by dedicated artisans, capturing the attention of every passerby. Among these, one of the most authentic and historic crafts is the Charoq, a type of traditional footwear. Once widely produced and sold by skilled artisans, this craft has been passed down through generations. Today, however, enthusiasts fear that it is at risk of disappearing. Charoq shoes are crafted using cowhide leather, colored silk threads, and Golabtoon threads, produced in a range of styles. The roots of leather craftsmanship in Zanjan can be traced back at least two thousand years. The art of Charoq making likely originated in the Sassanid era, reaching its decorative peak during the Safavid period. Its beauty and the diversity of patterns and motifs continue to captivate anyone with

an appreciation for traditional arts, IRNA wrote. Historical records indicate that the origin of this craft in Zanjan Province was the city of Soltaniyeh, from where it later spread to the city of Zanjan itself. In past decades, the number of Charoq artisans in Zanjan reflected the growth and flourishing of this authentic craft. Today, however, experts warn that without careful attention and support, Charoq may vanish forever. One of the most renowned figures in this field is Mardali Heidari, a 70-year-old master of traditional Charoq making. He continues to teach enthusiasts at the Zanjan Museum of Laundry, known locally as Rakshouykhaneh. Heidari decorates different sections of Charoq shoes with Golabtoon thread embroidery, depicting historical landmarks of Zanjan, including the Soltaniyeh Dome, the Rakshouykhaneh building, the Mirbahaddin Bridge, and monuments from other cities. Reflecting on his early years, he recalled beginning work in one of Zan-

jan's market workshops as a child. Even at a young age, he straightened old and bent nails and waxed the threads used in shoe-making. Over six decades of dedication, he has trained approximately 500 students in this traditional art. Despite being officially retired, he continues to teach for three hours each day at the Rakshouykhaneh Museum. The artisan noted that the current state of this craft is far less vibrant than in earlier times. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic challenges have caused a sharp decline in its practice. Rising costs of raw materials due to economic fluctuations, combined with a decreasing number of students and enthusiasts, have made it increasingly difficult for Charoq making to survive. He added that despite repeatedly informing senior government officials that Charoq production no longer has buyers, previous efforts to establish a dedicated Charoq store have failed, leaving the craft without a commercial platform. The President of the Association of Handicraft



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Producers and Exporters at the Zanjan Chamber of Commerce, Fatemeh Abdollahi, also highlighted the cultural and artistic value of Charoq. She noted that both domestic and international art enthusiasts are captivated by its abstract and authentic patterns. Abdollahi explained that in earlier times, Charoq shoes were sewn in a very simple form. The transformations and intricate designs seen on Charoqs today were first introduced by the late Asghar Khatibi. He was the first artisan to create a Charoq mold using clay coated with paper. She added that modern Charoqs have largely lost their original practical function and are now primarily decorative

items. Women and girls often use them as indoor or ceremonial shoes rather than everyday footwear. The Charoqs currently produced in Zanjan are delicate and decorative, significantly different from traditional Charoqs. The original Zanjan Charoq was made from raw leather, primarily worn by shepherds in villages. These shoes were usually heelless and fastened to the lower leg with straps. Abdollahi expressed concern that some traditional crafts, including Charoq, are struggling due to the lack of a stable market and insufficient branding. Without intervention, these crafts are at serious risk of disappearing entirely. She also pointed to ongoing efforts to promote Charoq for export. Through negotiations, the association hopes to implement measures to better introduce, market, and even export these shoes, aiming to preserve this important cultural heritage and prevent it from being forgotten.

