

Archaeological breakthroughs boost UNESCO nomination of Falak-ol-Aflak Castle

Iranica Desk

Extensive archaeological excavations at the historic mound of Falak-ol-Aflak Castle in Lorestan Province have resulted in major discoveries that are reshaping the understanding of the site's long-term occupation and significantly strengthening Iran's case for the castle's inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Carried out under an official permit issued by the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, the excavations directly respond to UNESCO's requirement for comprehensive and well-documented scientific evidence. The new findings move the iconic Sassanid-era fortress and its underlying mound one step closer to inclusion in the proposed World Heritage nomination dossier titled "Prehistoric Sites of the Khorramabad Valley." The most consequential discovery of the current excavation season directly challenges long-standing assumptions that the archaeological layers of the mound were confined to historical periods. The archaeological

team, led by Hamzeh Ghabadizadeh, uncovered well-preserved, in-situ architectural remains dating to the Neolithic-Chalcolithic period, constructed directly on the bedrock of the mound. These remains include stone-built walls and carefully compacted floors, providing rare physical evidence of early permanent structures, according to ISNA.

"This represents the first well-documented and reliable phase of permanent architecture identified on this mound," Ghabadizadeh said. "It clearly demonstrates that the site was not simply a temporary or seasonal camp, but rather a center of permanent settlement that was contemporaneous with the later phases of the prehistoric chronology of the Khorramabad Valley." In addition to architectural evidence, the excavations produced a substantial assemblage of pottery that firmly situates the mound within the prehistoric cultural sequence of the Zagros region. Ceramic fragments dating to the Late Neolithic and Early Chalcolithic periods (approximately 5300-4300 BCE) indicate



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that village-based settlement at this location began around 7,000 years ago. Moreover, the discovery of Proto-Elamite pottery links Khorramabad to broad and well-established ancient communication and exchange networks that once connected large parts of western Iran. Ata Hassanpour, Director General of Lorestan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Hand-

crafts Organization, described the results as transformative, emphasizing that the importance of the site extends far beyond the emergence of early agricultural villages. He explained that surface surveys conducted over the past two years by specialists in Paleolithic archaeology have confirmed that the natural limestone outcrop on which the

castle stands, along with its surrounding area, was used by Middle and Upper Paleolithic hunter-gatherer groups. "Elaborating on this," Hassanpour added, "the prehistoric evidence from the Falak-ol-Aflak mound demonstrates that the inhabitants of the Khorramabad Valley made use of caves, rock shelters, as well as the mound and the rock beneath the cas-

tle, as an interconnected chain of settlements serving different purposes. The presence of a protective rocky outcrop and direct access to fresh water from the Golestan Spring at the foot of the mound transformed this location into a focal point of human activity for at least 50,000 years."

Hassanpour also noted that a comprehensive plan is currently underway to clear the castle's visual buffer zone and to establish an integrated tourism route that will physically and conceptually connect Falak-ol-Aflak Castle with surrounding archaeological and heritage sites.

The final submission of this nomination dossier to UNESCO represents a pivotal moment in Iran's cultural diplomacy. By physically and symbolically linking Falak-ol-Aflak Castle with the prehistoric caves and the historic core of Khorramabad, the initiative highlights a new chapter in the long continuity of prehistoric cultures in the Zagros region and reinforces Lorestan's identity as one of the most enduring centers of human history in Iran.

Restoration of Tabriz Clock Tower enters new phase



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The Deputy Mayor of Tabriz has announced that the historic Clock Tower has entered a new stage of restoration and organization. This latest phase emphasizes interior improvements, staircase upgrades, landscaping of the surrounding grounds, and the revival of historic sections of the landmark structure. Mehdi Nikbakht described the phase as a transition to a broader restoration scope, encompassing interior remodeling and courtyard modernization. The current focus includes securing and upgrading the building's staircases, repairing

worn wall coverings, applying fresh paint throughout the rooms, and resurfacing the grounds to enhance safety, organization, and visual appeal, chtn.ir wrote. Highlighting further steps, Nikbakht noted that disproportionate visual units and later-added extensions would be removed to restore the structure's authentic historic form. In addition, the old rooms of the Clock Tower are being revived, to be returned to their original state and repurposed for cultural, administrative, and public viewing functions. A flagship project within this phase is

the restoration of the building's carpeted hall, a space rich with historical identity. Upon completion, the hall will be open to citizens and visitors, preserving its architectural features while showcasing the city's heritage. Nikbakht emphasized that all restoration work would adhere to technical standards and heritage preservation principles, maintaining the clock tower's architectural integrity while improving public access and tourism opportunities.

The Clock Tower of Tabriz, one of the most iconic landmarks, has long stood as a symbol of the city's history and culture. Erected in the early 20th century, the tower has witnessed generations of residents and continues to hold a special place in the collective memory of Tabriz. Its distinctive clock and intricate architecture make it a centerpiece of the city's urban landscape. The ongoing restoration represents a significant step in preserving Tabriz's historical identity. By combining careful preservation with modernized facilities, the project aims to strengthen the clock tower's role as a cultural hub, attracting both locals and tourists and ensuring that this historic monument continues to inspire for decades to come.

Dezful moves to keep pulse of own historic fabric alive

Iranica Desk

The head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Dezful in Khuzestan Province has emphasized the importance of keeping the city's historic fabric alive, noting that while the number of historic houses changes constantly due to daily monitoring, the true priority lies in preserving the living pulse of the historic area.

Hamidreza Khadem said that this pulse continues to beat through restoration efforts, collective memory, cultural and religious rituals, and the continued presence of residents within the historic fabric. He highlighted the vast scale of Dezful's historic area, stating that the city encompasses approximately 244 hectares of historic urban fabric, chtn.ir wrote. According to Khadem, over time some historic houses have been destroyed, while others were constructed during the Iran-Iraq war period. He noted that many of the existing houses within the historic fabric have undergone alterations, and a number of them have been restored by their owners. He explained that so far, 81 houses in Dezful's historic fabric have been registered on the National Heritage List. However, he stressed that the actual number of historic houses is far greater than this figure. Due to ongoing daily monitoring, providing a fully accurate and fixed statistic is not possible, as the condition of houses is constantly changing, including assessments of how many structures remain standing. Khadem added that a portion of the houses currently undergoing restoration are part of an annexation plan

connected to the historic Qotb House within Dezful's historic fabric. As a result, statistics related to restored houses are continually changing and must be updated regularly.

Addressing Dezful's World Heritage-related initiatives, Khadem said that the city has already been registered with UNESCO as a World City of Kapu Weaving. He added that efforts are currently underway to pursue the global registration of Pamenar village as a tourism destination. The village, he noted, is located outside the city's urban boundaries.



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As a craft, Kapu describes hand-woven sphere-like objects that may have lids, too. It is categorized as a kind of mat weaving and is done by weaving leaflets of palm trees around a special kind of straw-like object. He further pointed out that Dezful's handicrafts sector is not limited to Kapu weaving. Other refined and traditional crafts, such as woodturning, are also practiced in the city and require greater exposure at the international level through specialized events and cultural programs. Explaining the department's key priorities, Khadem stated that the primary focus is on pre-

serving houses that have already been nationally registered. Following that, attention is given to houses that possess historical value but have not yet been registered. He noted that cultural heritage authorities directly intervene in the preservation of nationally registered houses, while historically valuable but unregistered properties are addressed through investment mechanisms or by encouraging and guiding private owners. Khadem emphasized the department's continuous presence within the historic

serves as a venue for celebrations as well as religious ceremonies, including celebratory chants and mourning recitations.

He added that when such historic spaces remain active within the urban fabric, the pulse of the area grows stronger. As long as these individual pulses remain connected, he said, the heart of the historic fabric will continue to live.

Regarding construction regulations in Dezful's historic areas, Khadem explained that strict height limitations are enforced, preventing owners from exceeding established regulations. He noted that building heights must comply with designated height codes and, in some cases, adhere to urban maps dating back to 1956. Structures that were originally single-story must remain so, and buildings that historically featured courtyards must preserve that architectural pattern.

He also stressed that building façades must be traditional in design and constructed using approved traditional materials. Additions such as protruding elements, awnings, and similar features are prohibited. Even newly built walls, he said, must be executed in accordance with traditional architectural styles. Addressing support mechanisms, Khadem clarified that assistance provided by the department is not in the form of direct financial aid. However, support is offered when a restored house is assigned an accommodation, service, hospitality, or cultural function that contributes to job creation. He added that houses renovated solely for personal residential use are not eligible for financial support.