

Archaeological research launched at Sassanid Palace of Firuzabad

Iranica Desk

The first season of the comprehensive research and archaeological excavation project at the Sassanid Palace of Firuzabad, known also as Ardashir Babakan Palace, has officially begun. The project is being conducted through an integrated approach combining archaeology, historical architecture, and cultural landscape studies. It is directed by Azita Mirzaei of the Research Institute of Archaeology and is supported by the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Fars Province, as well as the UNESCO-listed Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of the Fars Region. This research project has been designed and implemented with the aim of producing reliable and well-documented reference data, reinterpreting the architectural-ritual functions of the palace, and clarifying buried architectural structures, particularly in the northern part of the site, IRNA reported.

During this season of research, a range of modern documenta-

tion techniques and non-destructive investigation methods are being employed. These include high-precision topographic surveying, terrestrial and aerial photogrammetry using drones, and geophysical studies. In addition, targeted excavations of the architectural remains in the courtyard located opposite the northern ivan are included in the research agenda, with the objective of clarifying the building's functions and establishing its chronology. Focusing on field data and archaeological analyses, this research seeks to reinterpret the architectural-ritual functions and the evolutionary development of the palace in relation to the Sassanid Archaeological Landscape, and can contribute to enhancing scholarly understanding of the site's position within the architectural system and settlement patterns of the Sassanid period. This season of excavation will continue until late February, and a ten-member research and executive team is currently present on site conducting excavation op-

erations. The scientific outcomes of this season's work will be announced in due course. The Ardashir Babakan Palace, located five kilometers from Firuzabad, is among the summer palaces of Ardashir I of the Sassanid dynasty. Built of stone and gypsum mortar, the palace is renowned for its magnificent stucco work and decorative elements in its halls, and it bears a close resemblance to the Tachara Palace, the exclusive building of Darius I at Persepolis. Qal'eh Dokhtar of Firuzabad is located six kilometers from the Firuzabad-Shiraz road. The structure, situated on the slope of a mountain overlooking the road, features refined and impressive architecture and was constructed using rubble stone, rammed gypsum, and sarooj mortar. The Sassanid Archaeological Landscape of the Fars Region is the official designation given by UNESCO to eight Sassanid archaeological sites located in southeastern Fars Province, Iran. The property was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List on June 30, 2018.



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Bareh Zard Cave; hidden gem of Ilam Province

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Bareh Zard Cave, one of Ilam Province's most astonishing yet lesser-known tourist attractions, is located in the highlands of Sivan Mountain along the road from Ilam to Darreh Shahr, about 35 kilometers from the main route, near Pakal village. Also called Konarikah Cave, it extends nearly 350 meters deep and features a maze of interconnected tunnels and chambers that captivate visitors at first sight. The cave's entrance is very narrow, requiring visitors to crawl through, but the tunnel gradually widens, making passage easier further inside. The

cave houses a variety of stalagmites and stalactites, stone columns and curtains, and a small water pool, all contributing to its natural allure, ISNA wrote. Temperatures inside remain extremely cold even during summer, so visitors are advised to bring warm clothing. The cave's chill is so intense that no living creatures can live there.

Farzad Sharifi, Director General of Ilam Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, told ISNA that the height of some chambers exceeds 12 meters. He highlighted the cave's unique formations — stalagmites of varying sizes, intricate stone

crystals, and winding passageways — which make it visually stunning. Sharifi emphasized that Bareh Zard Cave is ancient and its formations are of great cultural and scientific significance. Visitors should enter with proper spelunking equipment and experience, as the cave contains no oxygen and no living organisms.

The cave's water pool, wide stone columns, and curtain-like formations, along with sculptural shapes formed by stalagmites and stalactites, make it a remarkable natural wonder and a must-see destination for adventurous travelers.

Qasr-e Shirin demands hundred years of digs

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The head of the Preservation and Restoration Group for Historical Buildings and Sites of Kermanshah Province's Cultural Heritage Department highlighted the numerous historical artifacts from the Sassanid period located within the city of Qasr-e Shirin and stated, "This city requires the equivalent of 100 years of archaeological work to fully uncover its historical legacy."

In an interview with ISNA, Siavash Shahbazi, referring to the remarkable abundance of historical sites across Qasr-e Shirin, elaborated, "Based on the archaeological discoveries made in Qasr-e Shirin so far, this city was historically one of the principal focal points of interest for kings both in the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras."

He further added, "There are numerous historical artifacts scattered throughout Qasr-e Shirin, and if we intend to conduct comprehensive archaeological work across this entire city, many years of dedicated effort are fundamentally needed."

Noting that one of the most famous

and significant historical sites in this city is the Khosrow Palace, he stated, "As archaeologists have affirmed, this edifice was once an exceptionally magnificent structure situated within a large, royal garden."

He strongly emphasized, "To date, six distinct phases of archaeological excavation have been conducted at Khosrow Palace, which have collectively led to the discovery of a significant and substantial portion of the architectural remains of this grand structure."

Shahbazi continued, explicitly stating that this extensive historical site still requires at least three more full excavation seasons. He added, "Throughout the past several years, specific funds and budgetary allocations have been secured for the continuation of archaeological excavations at Khosrow Palace, and this year we have also strategically prioritized it for ongoing and future archaeological digs."

He specifically noted, "Following the formal allocation and release of the necessary funds, the seventh season of focused archaeological excavations at

Khosrow Palace is scheduled to commence in the coming year."

He went on to clarify the objectives, saying, "In this new and upcoming season of archaeological excavations at Khosrow Palace, archaeologists will specifically seek to find any physical traces or remnants of the vast, surrounding garden of this royal palace, the description of which is vividly recorded in various historical sources and texts."

He additionally explained, "If any verifiable traces or archaeological evidence of this illustrious garden are successfully found, we will meticulously document and record them in detail, with the ultimate aim of restoring this ancient edifice closer to the original grandeur and splendor it once possessed in antiquity."

Shahbazi further recalled, providing historical and modern context, "In past times and centuries, Qasr-e Shirin was widely regarded as a highly strategic and important geographical point by numerous kings and rulers. Today, this region is also strategically located on the main transit route for



pilgrims visiting the holy shrines and, from another perspective, functions as an active commercial route featuring a busy border market. Therefore, given

these combined factors, it possesses significant and promising potential to develop into a major tourism hub within the province."