

# Archaeological excavation begins in Zarqan

## Iranica Desk

An archaeological excavation project has begun in the city of Zarqan with the aim of identifying, documenting, and defining the boundaries and buffer zones of its historical sites.

The head of the archaeological team Ebrahim Rostaei-Farsi stated that the excavation is being conducted under the supervision of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, the Archaeological Research Center, and the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Fars Province, with financial support from the Zarqan Municipality. The project includes test trenching to identify cultural layers and architectural remains from various historical periods within the city's historic fabric. He added that preliminary studies have revealed significant evidence of human settlement in the area, which requires more detailed fieldwork and excavation.



Rostaei-Farsi also highlighted the unique location of Zarqan, noting that its historical remains lie in proximity to Persepolis and prehistoric civilizations. He emphasized that

this makes the excavation and the determination of protected zones even more critical for preserving the city's historical identity and its urban heritage.

He further stated that all phases of the excavation will be carried out under the direct supervision of experts and in full coordination with the Cultural Heritage Protection Unit of the Fars

Province's Cultural Heritage Organization.

Zarqan is a historic city in southern Iran, just northeast of Shiraz. Its location places it within one of the most culturally significant regions of Iran, an area long associated with ancient Persian civilization.

One of Zarqan's most notable features is its proximity to Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire founded by Darius the Great. Because of this, the wider region around Zarqan has been continuously inhabited for thousands of years, with layers of settlement dating back to prehistoric times.

Historically, Zarqan developed as a small but strategically placed settlement along regional routes connecting Shiraz to northern and eastern regions. Over time, it evolved into a local center for agriculture and trade. The surrounding plains are relatively fertile compared to much of the region, supporting

crops and orchards that have sustained local communities for generations.

In terms of cultural heritage, Zarqan contains a historic urban fabric with traditional houses, narrow streets, and remnants of older architectural styles. However, like many growing towns, parts of this historic fabric have been affected by modern development, which is one reason archaeological projects like the current excavation are important — they help identify and protect what remains of the city's past.

Today, Zarqan is also influenced by its closeness to Shiraz, benefiting from economic and infrastructural connections while still retaining aspects of its local identity. The ongoing archaeological work could significantly enhance understanding of how this town fits into the broader historical landscape of ancient Fars and the civilizations surrounding Persepolis.

## Kan Gonbad site yields bronze age finds

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A prehistoric archaeology graduate has said that the ancient site of Kan Gonbad in Iran's Ilam Province, dating back approximately 2,500 to 2,600 BCE, has attracted scholarly attention due to a range of significant discoveries, including bronze artifacts, handmade pottery, and engraved beads. Habibollah Mahmoudian said that the historic site is located in the southwest of Ilam, along a secondary road leading to the villages of Mar Barreh and Gol Gol in the Malekshahi region,

near the northern slopes of Mount Nakhjir. The cemetery has been excavated by an archaeological team from Iran's Cultural Heritage Organization, with multiple burial sites examined across four excavation trenches. He noted that two main types of pottery were identified at the site: plain and decorated wares. The plain pottery is mostly red, with some examples in black or darker tones, and appears to have been handmade. Small bowls, jars, and some handled vessels were among the ceramic objects uncovered.

Highlighting special finds, Mahmoudian referred to a cylindrical bead made of greenish stone, measuring 22mm in height and 9mm in diameter. The bead features an engraving of a bull with raised horns standing in front of a tree. He also explained that necklaces discovered at the site were made of stone and shell beads, including both fine and coarse agate pieces. Among the stone objects, only half of a fossilized sedimentary bowl was recovered from the cemetery. The archaeological team estimates that the site dates

to between 2600 and 2500 BCE.

Mahmoudian added that a large portion of the artifacts discovered in the cemetery are bronze objects, including daggers, blades, chisels, hooks, awls, bracelets, and metal rings.

He further noted that the name Kan Gonbad comes from two Kurdish words: Kan, meaning house, and Gonbad, meaning hidden treasure. According to local beliefs, the site is thought to be the burial place of an ancient royal treasure, concealed within the mountains to protect it from invaders.



ISNA

## Shaneh Tarash village eyes UN tourism list

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A global initiative launched about five years ago by UN Tourism has been redefining how rural destinations gain international recognition. Centered on the vitality of rural life and the active participation of local communities, the program has brought new attention to villages that embody sustainable development. Among Iran's contenders, Shaneh Tarash village in Tonekabon, Mazandaran Province, is now regarded by experts as meeting the criteria for inclusion on the list of the world's best tourism villages. Shaneh Tarash's candidacy is no coincidence. For years, the village has pursued a path of sustainable development built on community engagement and facilitation efforts. This long-term approach has enabled it to secure a place among eight Iranian nominees for global tourism village recognition, relying heavily on social capital and grassroots initiatives, according to IRNA.

Experts attribute the village's growing reputation in organic tourism to several key developments: the spontaneous formation of an integrated network of eco-lodges, the revival of forgotten handicrafts, the establishment of a local museum,

the restoration of traditional architecture, and the completion of a tourism value chain. Today, Shaneh Tarash is seen as a model of "conservation-through-utilization," where the protection of natural and local resources is directly tied to the livelihoods and economic benefits of residents — an approach that strengthens both sustainability and competitiveness.

Speaking at a recent meeting on the village's nomination process, Mehdi Baharvand, head of Office for Development of Attractions and Tourism Products at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, stated that Shaneh Tarash has reached a level of

maturity due to its successful organic destination management and continuous community participation in the revival of handicrafts and the development of eco-tourism.

He highlighted the evolving criteria of UN Tourism, noting that over the past five years, the organization has prioritized not only environmental and conservation indicators but also development-oriented approaches driven by local communities. The ultimate goal, he said, is to ensure that residents benefit directly from tourism while transforming villages into international destinations.

Baharvand also stressed that, with a limited timeframe re-

maining for the final dossier submission, efforts should focus less on heavy infrastructure projects and more on producing narrative-driven and well-documented content. He emphasized that multimedia presence and digital visibility are crucial evaluation factors, as international judges often begin by searching online for credible and multilingual information about candidate villages.

Local cooperation has also played a vital role. According to officials, coordination between national bodies and local institutions has accelerated efforts to address shortcomings and meet global standards. The involvement of municipal authorities

and natural resource agencies reflects an unprecedented level of institutional collaboration.

Tonekabon's mayor described the initiative as a unifying force, bringing together different agencies in pursuit of a shared objective. He noted that such cooperation would not typically occur without the momentum created by the global recognition process. Even beyond the final outcome, this synergy is expected to enhance the village's development trajectory and help it meet international benchmarks.

Mohammad-Ebrahim Larijani further explained that the criteria set by UN Tourism are rooted in the authentic flow of rural

life. While achieving global standards may be challenging, he said, the essence lies in preserving local ecosystems, ensuring communities benefit from tourism revenues, and maintaining traditional lifestyles, crafts, and architecture.

Nestled in the pristine natural landscape of Tonekabon, Shaneh Tarash is more than just a rural settlement — it is a living repository of handicrafts and intangible cultural heritage from Mazandaran. Its potential global recognition represents not merely a symbolic title, but a unique opportunity to showcase the tourism potential of western Mazandaran, stimulate economic growth, and preserve a heritage passed down through generations.

Importantly, the village's nomination is part of a process under UN Tourism and should not be confused with listings by UNESCO. While UNESCO focuses primarily on safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage, UN Tourism emphasizes villages that leverage tourism as a driver of sustainable development, job creation, and the preservation of local lifestyles. This distinction underscores Shaneh Tarash's ambition — not as a static museum, but as a vibrant, living village poised for global recognition.



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