Sistan Anthropology Museum preserves 5,000 years of civilization

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Sistan and Baluchestan Province, a land steeped in memories both ancient and recent, lies in the heart of Iran's historic desert landscape — a region where every grain of soil holds a story thousands of years old.

The culture of the people of Sistan has been shaped by the wisdom of water, wind, and sunlight, reflecting a unique blend of patience, resilience, and ingenuity in confronting the forces of nature.

The Sistan Anthropology Museum is far more than a repository of historical artifacts; it is a reflection of the spirit, traditions, and beliefs cultivated by the people of this region across centuries. Each gallery of the museum presents a vivid portrayal of the work, art, customs, language, clothing, cuisine, and livelihoods of communities that built a remarkable civilization founded on solidarity and wisdom. The museum also serves as a gateway to the region's dynamic culture — one preserved through carpets and kilims, traditional embroidery, oral traditions, and ceremonial practices that continue to shape both Iranian and Sistani identity today, according to chtn.ir.

Visiting the Sistan Anthropology Museum offers an opportunity to experience a living culture whose roots extend deep into history and whose traditions remain alive in the everyday lives of local people.

Safar Peyghan, director of the museum, said the institution's primary mission is to raise public awareness about cultural heritage and encourage both citizens and scholars to participate in preserving this national treasure. According to Peyghan, the museum tells the story of generations of people who, over thousands of years, shaped their culture, livelihoods, arts, and beliefs in this land. As a result, a visit to the museum becomes a step-by-step journey from the distant past to the present day.

Highlighting the more than 5,000-year history of Sistan's civilization, Peyghan explained that the museum's 30 exhibition halls carefully trace the historical development of the region from the era of Shahr-e Sukhteh, or the Burnt City, to modern times.

He noted that a significant portion of the museum is dedicated to Shahr-e Sukhteh, an ancient city of which only around 10 percent has been excavated. Despite the limited excavations, archaeologists have uncovered extraordinary discoveries, including evidence of cranial surgery, an artificial eye, measuring instruments, one of the world's earliest forms of animation, and commercial artifacts such as seals and imported stones.

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Peyghan added that following the Shahr-e Sukhteh section, the museum introduces visitors to other important archaeological sites in Sistan, including Dahan-e Gholaman and Kuh-e Khajeh.

He described Kuh-e Khajeh as one of the region's most significant sites for understanding the daily life and livelihoods of ancient communities. Evidence of animal husbandry, fishing, carpet and kilim weaving, and indigenous technologies such as the construction of traditional "Tutan" reed boats are all reflected in the museum's exhibits.

According to Peyghan, the gallery dedicated to Kuh-e Khajeh extends into the Islamic era and features tools, weapons, agricultural equipment, and examples of the rituals and religious beliefs practiced by people who once lived in some of Sistan's most important settlements.

He further explained that the exhibits from Kuh-e Khajeh reveal evidence of animal husbandry, fishing, carpet weaving, and boat construction, while the Tutan reed boat stands as a symbol of local innovation during that period. The gallery also showcases religious traditions such as Ta'zieh performances alongside agricultural tools and handmade weapons, all produced using indigenous methods and materials.

Emphasizing that Sistan's culture cannot be reduced merely to stone and mud-brick relics, Peyghan stated that the museum's 30 exhibition halls collectively represent the living heritage of the region. The museum seeks to demonstrate how the people of Sistan, despite enduring some of the harshest climatic conditions over five millennia, succeeded not only in adapting to their environment but also in creating an advanced civilization rich in artistic and technical achievements.

Peyghan also pointed to the museum's handicrafts section, where galleries dedicated to embroidery, spinning, carpet weaving, kilim weaving, Shahnameh traditions, water-right agreements, and jewelry-making illustrate key aspects of the culture and livelihoods of earlier generations. He noted that in the past, nearly every household in Sistan functioned as a carpet-weaving workshop, making weaving one of the region's central family occupations.

The museum director also highlighted the discovery of 5,000-year-old jewelry in the region. Crafted from finely carved and perforated stones, these ornaments demonstrate a level of precision whose exact production techniques remain unknown to researchers today.

Referring to the discovery of a board game in Shahr-e Sukhteh, Peyghan said the finding reveals that the people of that era valued not only work and trade but also entertainment and leisure activities, reflecting a relatively prosperous and culturally vibrant society in ancient Sistan.

Stressing that Sistan's culture remains dynamic and alive, he explained that the museum is gradually evolving into an educational center where students and researchers engage not only in visits, but also in studying and rediscovering their historical roots.

He added that the museum's ultimate goal is for every visitor to leave with a renewed sense of pride in their homeland, because Sistan is "the land of firsts" — a land of knowledge, creativity, and artistic traditions, many of which remain largely unknown to the wider world.

Ardabil Carpet remains masterpiece of Persian Art in London

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ISNA

Among the many Iranian artistic and historical treasures preserved in major museums around the world, the Ardabil Carpet holds an exceptional place. Considered by many scholars of Islamic art and carpet history to be one of the finest and most important carpets ever woven, the masterpiece is not only a testament to the skill of Iranian weavers but also a symbol of the peak of Persian artistic achievement during the Safavid era.

The Ardabil Carpet was woven between 1539 and 1540 CE (946 AH) during the reign of Shah Tahmasp I. The date appears in an inscription woven into the carpet's border, making it widely recognized as the oldest dated carpet in the world. The inscription also mentions "Maqsud Kashani," believed to have been the supervisor or master of the royal workshop responsible for its production, according to ISNA.

The existence of such an inscription reflects the elevated status of carpet weaving in Safavid Iran, where carpets were regarded not merely as functional objects but as works of spiritual and artistic significance.

Measuring approximately 10.5 meters in length and more than 5 meters in width, the Ardabil Carpet is remarkable in scale. Yet what has drawn even greater admiration from researchers is its extraordinary technical sophistication. Experts estimate that the carpet contains more than 25 million knots, demonstrating a level of craftsmanship achieved by Iranian weavers in the 16th century that still astonishes textile specialists today.

The carpet was woven with silk warp and weft and wool pile, while its colors — despite centuries of aging — have retained remarkable richness and depth. Shades of deep blue, cream, gold, and dark red were created using natural dyes, highlighting the advanced dyeing knowledge that existed in Iran at the time.

Its dense wool pile, capable of preserving color more effectively than silk, contains roughly 5,300 knots per 10 square centimeters. This extraordinary density allowed the designers to incorporate intricate details throughout the composition. Producing a carpet of such size and complexity would have required years of labor and the coordinated efforts of numerous highly skilled weavers.

The design itself is considered one of the carpet's greatest artistic achievements. A deep blue background is covered with elaborate floral motifs, arabesques, and intertwined vines surrounding a large sun-like medallion at the center. Many scholars believe the central design was inspired by Persian domes and architectural geometry. The four corners mirror portions of the same medallion, creating a harmonious and mathematically balanced composition that reflects the Safavid mastery of symmetry and proportion.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Ardabil Carpet is the story of the two original carpets. The carpet now displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum was originally part of a matching pair believed to have been commissioned for the shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili in the city of Ardabil. Such paired carpets were commonly used in royal and religious architecture to create visual symmetry within interior spaces.

Both carpets reportedly remained at the shrine until the 19th century, and British visitors documented seeing them there in 1843. Decades later, according to accounts preserved by the museum, the shrine suffered damage — possibly from an earthquake — and the carpets were removed. Many historians believe they were sold to finance restoration work, though details surrounding the transaction remain unclear.

During the late Qajar period, European demand for Eastern art and Persian carpets grew rapidly. The British company Ziegler & Co., active in the Persian carpet trade, acquired the two Ardabil Carpets. Because one carpet had suffered significant damage, parts of it were used to restore the better-preserved piece. As a result, the carpet now in London survived in a more complete condition, while the second carpet lost sections of its borders and field.

The restored carpet was purchased by the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1893. Influential English designer William Morris, a leading figure of the Arts and Crafts Movement, reportedly described the carpet as "perfect" and praised its harmony and logic of design, playing a major role in persuading the museum to acquire it. The museum ultimately paid £2,000 for the piece — an extraordinary sum at the time.

The second carpet later entered American collections and eventually became part of the holdings of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, where it remains today, albeit in a less complete condition than its London counterpart.

Today, the Ardabil Carpet is regarded as far more than a museum object. It stands as a symbol of the ingenuity, precision, and creativity of Iranian artisans and a reminder that Persian carpet weaving had achieved an extraordinary artistic maturity centuries before carpets became a global commercial commodity.

Even today, despite changing lifestyles and the rise of machine-made products, hand-woven Persian carpets remain among the most enduring symbols of Iranian traditional art. In this context, the Ardabil Carpet continues to embody the continuity of Iranian creativity — a masterpiece that, nearly five centuries after its creation, still inspires admiration among museum visitors, historians, and art scholars around the world.