

# New discoveries shed light on ancient sanctuary at Vigol site

## Iranica Desk

Archaeological excavations at the historic site of Vigol, Isfahan Province, have led to the discovery of a new hall and the bases of offering tables, according to a local cultural heritage official. Speaking to IRNA, Seyyed Rouhollah Seyyedolagari, Deputy Director-General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Isfahan Province, announced that the third season of excavations at the Vigol archaeological site has yielded significant findings, including the identification of a previously unknown hall. He said that the Vigol archaeological site is one of Iran's most important historical locations. Field studies indicate that religious activities at the sanctuary discovered there continued for up to two centuries after the advent of Islam in Iran. Highlighting the site's impor-



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tance, Seyyedolagari noted that, based on the findings so far, the sanctuary is considered one of the best-preserved

examples discovered in the country. Its architectural spaces and structural features have remained remarkably intact.

Providing details about the third excavation season, which began approximately two months ago under the direc-

tion of Mohsen Javeri and in cooperation with the University of Kashan, Seyyedolagari said that researchers have identified a new hall within the sanctuary complex. The hall contains bases believed to have supported offering tables. In addition, two other architectural structures have been uncovered adjacent to the hall, and specialized studies are underway to determine their precise function.

Addressing concerns among cultural heritage lovers regarding a proposed road project that would pass through the protected area of the historic site, Seyyedolagari stressed that the plan has not yet been approved by the provincial Cultural Heritage Organization and that no final decision has been made. He added that existing concerns will remain under consideration until detailed expert assessments are completed.

The first season of archaeological excavations at Vigol was conducted in 2010, focusing on the central fire temple area and building on surface evidence and exploratory surveys carried out by an archaeological team from the University of Tehran between 2006 and 2008.

Those excavations led to the discovery of the fire temple's central architectural plan and a distinctive 38-spoked fire altar shaped like an inverted palm tree.

The second season of excavations began in May 2021, concentrating on the area surrounding the temple's central circumambulation hall. This phase resulted in the discovery of plaster structures buried in adjacent spaces.

The Vigol archaeological site is located in Aran and Bidgol, approximately 215 kilometers north of Isfahan and 10 kilometers from Kashan.

## UNESCO nomination process for Bonab Kebab moves forward

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Ahmad Hamzehzadeh, Director-General of the East Azarbaijan Province Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, has highlighted the significance of Bonab Kebab in the cultural identity and tourism appeal of Bonab and the wider region, stating that its inscription on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage List could play a key role in promoting the tourism potential of both Bonab and the province. Hamzehzadeh noted that Bonab Kebab has already been registered on Iran's National Heritage

List and is among more than 70 Iranian culinary traditions under consideration for international recognition, according to chn.ir. He said that, following special efforts by the Governor-General of East Azarbaijan Province and a directive from the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, the process of preparing the nomination dossier has entered the implementation stage. In this regard, a contract has been signed with the national consultant responsible for preparing UNESCO nomination dossiers. Referring to Iran's ongoing UN-

ESCO nomination dossier for historic mosques, Hamzehzadeh said that the historic Mehrabad Mosque of Bonab has also been included among the proposed sites. He added that the inclusion of the mosque could further showcase the city's rich historical heritage. Hamzehzadeh also commented on the latest developments concerning the Qareh Qoshun Tourism Zone, describing it as one of the country's designated tourism development areas approved by the government. He said a memorandum of understanding has been signed between the pro-

vincial Cultural Heritage Department and Bonab Municipality to advance the project.

According to the official, the zone's master plan has been completed and finalized, while the Investment Commission of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has issued the required preliminary approval.

An investor has now been introduced by the municipality, and executive agencies are expected to expedite administrative procedures to facilitate the launch of the tourism development project.



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## Lake Urmia's remarkable revival brings new hope to northwest Iran

### Iranica Desk

At a time when drought continues to cast a shadow over many regions of the world, Lake Urmia, the iconic blue jewel of northwestern Iran, is telling a different story — one of revival, resilience, and renewed hope. Following years of environmental decline, one of the world's largest saltwater lakes is showing signs of recovery, offering a powerful example of nature's capacity for renewal when supported by favorable conditions and sustained efforts.

From roads now surrounded by water to boats gliding across its surface, from the towering Urmia Causeway to families once again gathering along the shoreline, the lake's transformation is visible across the landscape. Each scene reflects a new chapter in the ongoing recovery of one of Iran's most important natural treasures, according to IRNA.

### Blue waters return

Nestled among the mountains of West Azarbaijan Province, where cool winds mingle with the scent of rain and salt, Lake Urmia has once again expanded across the landscape. Once regarded as a symbol of environmental crisis, the lake has been

enriched significantly from recent precipitation, leading to a substantial increase in water levels. According to the latest figures, the lake's water level has reached 1,270.70 meters above sea level. The increase of 120 centimeters since the beginning of the current water year marks one of the most significant improvements recorded in recent years and has raised hopes for the lake's continued recovery.



The volume of water stored in the lake now stands at approximately 2.89 billion cubic meters, the highest level recorded in the past five years. Fresh images from the region show blue waters stretching toward the horizon, reflecting the sky above. Flamingos have returned to parts of the

lake, while gentle winds ripple across the surface, reviving scenes that had become increasingly rare during years of decline. For many residents and visitors, the revival of Lake Urmia is evident not only in official statistics but also in the renewed vitality of the landscape. Along the shoreline, people once again gather to witness the lake's expanding waters



and to contemplate a brighter future for the region.

### A road through water

One of the most striking symbols of the lake's recovery is a narrow roadway that now cuts through expanses of water. Vehicles move steadily along the route, with water visible on

both sides, creating a scene that only a few years ago would have seemed unlikely.

Surrounded by distant mountains, the roadway has become a visible reminder of the changing fortunes of the lake. For many observers, it symbolizes the renewed relationship between people and the natural environment after years of ecological stress. Every kilometer along the route offers further



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evidence that Lake Urmia is gradually reclaiming its place in the region's landscape.

### Tourism returns to shore

The lake's recovery is also breathing new life into tourism activities. Boats once again navigate parts of the lake, carrying visitors across waters

that had previously receded. In one scene, a yellow boat moves across the calm blue surface as passengers take in views of the surrounding mountains and open water.

Elsewhere, colorful pedal boats line the shallow shoreline, signaling the gradual return of recreational activities. Green, orange, and red boats stand ready for visitors eager to experience the lake firsthand. The



growing presence of tourists reflects increasing confidence in the future of the region and the renewed appeal of one of Iran's most famous natural attractions.

Local residents say the return of visitors has helped restore a sense of optimism. Beyond recreation, tourism is increas-

ingly viewed as an important component of broader efforts to reconnect communities with the lake and support local economic activity.

### Causeway as a symbol of renewal

The Urmia Causeway, one of the region's most recognizable landmarks, has emerged as another symbol of the lake's revival. For years, the structure overlooked large stretches of exposed lakebed and salt flats. Today, however, its foundations are once again surrounded by water, underscoring the scale of the recent recovery.

Vehicles continue to cross the causeway while water flows beneath it, creating a striking contrast between engineering infrastructure and the natural environment. The structure now stands as a reminder not only of the challenges Lake Urmia has faced but also of the determination to preserve and restore it.

Visitors gathering along the shoreline further illustrate the changing atmosphere. Families picnic near the water, travelers stop to admire the scenery, and residents enjoy views of the lake against a backdrop of mountains that still bear memories of years of drought.