

# Mashhad-e Kaveh emerges as potential world heritage candidate

Iranica Desk

Nestled among the green plains and foothills of the Zagros Mountains in Chadegan, Isfahan Province, a village stands as a testament to Iran's historical, cultural and religious identity: Mashhad-e Kaveh.

According to local beliefs and historical accounts, Mashhad-e Kaveh is traditionally believed to be associated with Kaveh the Blacksmith, the legendary hero of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. In the epic, Kaveh, a blacksmith by profession, leads a revolt against the tyranny of Zahhak and becomes a symbol of resistance against oppression and injustice, according to IRNA.

Local narratives say that after defeating Zahhak, Kaveh's remains were returned to his homeland according to his wishes and buried near the tomb of his son, Karen, in the area of Kovaliyeh. Over time, the village became known as "Mashhad-e Kaveh."

What distinguishes the area from many other historical sites is the combination of ancient Iranian heritage with Islamic spirituality and culture. Alongside the tomb attributed to Kaveh the Blacksmith stands the shrine of Imamzadeh Heydar ibn Ali, a site that many researchers and local residents consider a symbol of the connection between ancient Iran's struggle against injustice and the justice-oriented traditions associated with the descendants of Imam Ali (PBUH).

Today, Mashhad-e Kaveh is more than a religious or tourism destination; it is regarded as a living record of the continuity and coexistence of Iran's cultural and historical currents. The site preserves stories of legendary heroes and religious figures side by side, passing on a message of resistance against oppression and the defense of justice to future generations.

A cultural heritage expert said on Monday in an interview with IRNA that the tomb attributed to Kaveh the Blacksmith in Chadegan has exceptional potential and could become one of Iran's candidates for future world heritage registration.

Masih Vafadar said the monument still requires further archaeological studies before a complete nomination dossier can be prepared for global registration.

He added that accurately introducing the village of Mashhad-e Kaveh through scientific and documented research, along with improving facilities and training local residents to host visitors, would be the first step in this process.

The expert said that cultural and historical tourism packages and event-based tours could later be developed to attract domestic and international visitors.

Vafadar also emphasized the village's special role as one of the identity-shaping landmarks of Chadegan and called for greater attention to its potential and infrastructure needs.

Chadegan Governor Abdullah Sanaei said Mashhad-e Kaveh, with a population of more than 3,700 people, is among the Chadegan's active and dynamic villages. He said residents have built a strong social identity based

on unity, shared values, and their historical and cultural background.

He stressed the need to improve public services and tourism facilities, including guesthouses, pilgrim accommodations, libraries and recreational infrastructure, so the village can better function as a regional cultural and tourism hub.

The governor also announced plans for development projects, including the construction of a multi-phase guesthouse, and invited investors to participate in completing tourism infrastructure in the village.

Sanaei noted that Mashhad-e Kaveh's location near the Zayandeh Rud River has contributed to its appeal as a tourist destination, with the village hosting many travelers every year.

He added that the village's development indicators are favorable, making strategic and future-oriented planning essential for expanding tourism, cultural activities and services.

The head of Chadegan's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department also said the historical monument currently receives an average of around 20 visitors per day, with numbers increasing during holidays and weekends.

Gholamali Safari said that despite the monument's special historical value, current visitor numbers remain below expectations and that greater promotion and planning are needed. He added that accommodation facilities, including guesthouses and eco-lodges, have been prepared for travelers, helping support future tourism growth in the area.

Safari noted that complete restoration and renovation work on the monument was carried out in 2023, leaving the structure in good condition.

However, he said further tourism development requires projects such as expanding eco-lodges, improving landscaping and upgrading visitor services to make better use of the site's historical and cultural potential.

Mashhad-e Kaveh is a historical structure dating back to the Ilkhanid period (around the 8th century AH). It was registered on Iran's National Heritage List in 2018.

The complex includes two ancient graves and two graves from the Islamic era and is considered one of the most important historical sites in Chadegan.

From an archaeological research perspective, the Chadegan and its surrounding landscape occupy an important position in studies of settlement continuity in the central Zagros corridor. Although systematic excavations in the immediate vicinity remain limited, surface surveys and regional studies in western Isfahan have identified scattered evidence of ancient habitation, including pottery scatters and architectural traces that suggest long-term but fluctuating human use of the landscape. The proximity of the region to intermontane routes linking the Zagros highlands with central Iranian plains also increases its potential significance for understanding patterns of movement, seasonal settlement, and resource exploitation in different historical periods.



Attributed tomb of Kaveh the Blacksmith  
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Chadegan  
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## Qal'eh Ben Hill in Babol reveals layers of ancient history

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The second season of archaeological excavations at Qal'eh Ben Hill (Ben Castle Hill), located in the town of Khoshroud Pey in Babol, is currently underway as part of a joint research project between the University of Mazandaran and the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of the province.

The project is being carried out in cooperation with the Babol Governor's Office and Khoshroud Pey Municipality, under a permit issued by the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, and is led by Mojtaba Safari, a faculty member at the University of Mazandaran, according to chtn.ir.

Safari, head of the excavation team, said that the archaeological site of Qal'eh Ben Hill has been registered as a national heritage monument of Iran. Part of the site was damaged in 2011 during road construction and the widening of an urban road, and approximately three hectares of the original area remain today. The first season of archaeological excavation at the site was conducted in 2018. He explained that the second season of excavation aims to expand field investigations, identify architectural structures, reconstruct the subsistence patterns of the site's inhabitants, and clarify the settlement sequence of the area.

Preliminary findings from this season indicate that the upper layers of the site belong to the Islamic periods. These layers contain architectural remains from the Qajar era, including parts of a water supply and sewage disposal system. Archaeologists have also uncovered characteristic Islamic-era pottery, particularly from the early and middle Islamic centuries, along with metal and glass artifacts.

The archaeologist noted that evidence from the historical period has been identified in the lower layers, a significant portion of which is associated with burials from this era. He added that some of these graves were unfortunately damaged and destroyed in previous years by illegal excavators. However, pottery dating to the Iron Age and historical periods, particularly the Parthian and Sassanid eras, along with several metal objects, has been discovered in the layers associated with this period.

Safari further stated that at a depth of about two meters below the surface, researchers identified a deposit of fine-grained silty sediments containing numerous remains of small freshwater snails but no cultural materials. Initial studies suggest that this deposit was likely formed through the gradual separation of a branch of a meandering river, resulting in the creation of an oxbow lake. This natural event appears to have caused a settlement and cultural hiatus at the site, probably spanning the period from the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age until the re-establishment of settlements

during the historical and Islamic periods.

He added that at a depth of approximately three meters, cultural layers dating back to the Late Bronze Age were identified. These layers include architectural remains such as door thresholds, areas associated with hearths and cooking activities, as well as fallen and scattered mud-brick remains. Among the most significant discoveries from this section are grinding stones, stone mortars, and a collection of distinctive Late Bronze Age pottery.

Safari emphasized that the project has been designed as a long-term research initiative. In addition to its academic objectives, it seeks to assess the potential of Qal'eh Ben Hill to become a site museum in the future. The site's strategic location at the entrance to the town, the remaining extent of the archaeological area, the richness of its cultural layers, and the valuable results obtained from excavations are among the factors enhancing its potential for cultural tourism development and the promotion of the region's historical heritage.

He concluded that the project is being implemented with the support and cooperation of officials in Babol, the Western Bandpey District, and Khoshroud

Pey's municipal administration.

Continued research and preservation efforts, he said, could pave the way for

the future introduction and cultural utilization of this valuable heritage site as a site museum.

Babol, located in the central part of Mazandaran Province, has long been recognized as an important area for human

settlement due to its fertile

plains, abundant water resources, and proximity to the southern shores of the Caspian

Sea. Archaeological evidence from northern Iran indicates that communities have inhabited this region from prehistoric periods, with settlements developing along rivers and natural waterways.

The archaeological record of Mazandaran reflects a long sequence of cultural developments, including the Bronze Age, Iron Age, and historical periods. The region played a role in wider cultural networks connecting the southern Caspian area with other parts of the Iranian Plateau. Findings from archaeological sites across Mazandaran have revealed evidence of early agricultural activities, craft production, pottery traditions, and regional trade connections. The location of Qal'eh Ben Hill within this historical landscape highlights its importance for understanding ancient settlement patterns in Babol. The site's layers, spanning from the Late Bronze Age to the Islamic periods, provide valuable information about changes in architecture, economy, environment, and daily life over thousands of years. Its proximity to ancient waterways also suggests that environmental factors played a significant role in shaping settlement continuity and abandonment in the region.



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