

## Iranica Desk

The head of an archaeological survey team studying the Ahar Qanat in East Azarbaijan Province has announced the discovery of a historic structure named "Qirkh Ayakh" (meaning Forty Steps) and valuable sections of the city's traditional water supply system, saying the findings could pave the way for its national registration and potentially support efforts for future World Heritage recognition.

Mehdi Kazempour, an associate professor at the Islamic Art University of Tabriz, said field studies show that the qanat's source was located north of the city and that the underground water system extended approximately four kilometers from north to south, according to chn.ir. He added that researchers identified and documented 50 qanat shafts arranged

# Ahar Qanat discovery opens path to heritage recognition

in a row along the route during the recent studies. Kazempour highlighted the challenges of conducting archaeological work in a densely built urban area, saying that selecting suitable locations for excavation was difficult due to the presence of qanat channels and related structures within the city. The first test excavation was carried out near the historic Ahar Bazaar and adjacent to the Bazarbash Mosque (currently known as Imam Hassan Askari (PBUH) Mosque). The excavation provided researchers with valuable information about soil layers and the

geological characteristics of the area. Describing the architectural features of the discovered structure, Kazempour said the structure was built using stone and brick materials with lime-and-sand mortar and was connected to the water channel through a stepped passage. He emphasized that the evidence uncovered during recent excavations could strengthen the documentation required to register the Ahar Qanat on Iran's National Heritage List. According to Kazempour, the qanat meets important and engineering in Iran.

national registration due to its distinctive architectural elements, structural authenticity, continued operation, and historical role in supplying water to the city. Referring to the registration of Iran's qanat system on the UNESCO World Heritage List, he added that the Ahar Qanat, given its unique characteristics, historical significance, extensive water network, and role in the development of the historic city of Ahar, could become a valuable candidate in the future for World Heritage dossiers related to traditional water management and engineering in Iran.

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## Fars to revive historical sites through partnerships

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In April 2026, Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts delegated authority to Fars Province to transfer the operation and management rights of heritage buildings and cultural projects to the private sector under Article 27 of the regulations governing the organization and transfer of state-owned development projects.

The decision, which was made exclusively for Fars Province, places the region in a strategic position to reorganize its historical assets and bring stalled heritage projects to completion, IRNA wrote. Selected heritage buildings and projects can be handed over to private investors, who are required to restore, revive and manage the sites in line with approved regulations. In



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return, investors may benefit from operating the properties for a specified period under officially approved uses.

Fars authorities began a more active implementation of Article 27, identifying a list of unfinished projects and historical properties for transfer to non-governmental investors.

Sadeq Zar'e, Deputy Head of Fars Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, told IRNA that the first list of priority projects includes five museums.

He explained that the southeastern section of the Garden Museum of Celebrities, in-

cluding its parking area and handicrafts market, has been selected for completion and operation. Other museum projects include parts of the Fars Regional Museum, Bavand Museum, Abadeh Museum, and the Pasargadae Museum, which are planned to be completed through private-sector participation.

Authorities stressed that any new uses assigned to these heritage sites must be appropriate and compatible with their historical character.

Zar'e said that facilities such as art galleries, handicraft stalls and cafés could be developed alongside museums to create financial returns for investors while preserving the identity of the historic buildings.

He added that the Pasargadae Museum project requires further expert reviews due to its location within the boundaries

and protected zone of a World Heritage Site.

Zar'e said some properties owned by the Fars Cultural Heritage Department would be restored and revived by private investors, who would then receive operating permits under approved conditions.

Among the properties prioritized for transfer are Bagh-e Now (New Garden) and several historic houses.

He explained that the transfer process begins with a review and approval by the provincial Article 27 working group. The project must then receive approval from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage's Committee for Valuable Works. If a building is classified as a significant historical monument, the committee may reject its transfer. After these stages, techni-

cal and economic feasibility studies are prepared for each building or project, with studies for the listed sites currently underway.

Zar'e also announced that Article 27 could be used to develop tourism infrastructure and improve facilities in areas such as Margoon Waterfall, Behesht-e Gomshodeh (Lost Paradise), and Tang-e Baraq. He said multi-party agreements between the Cultural Heritage Department, private investors and other institutions could also be signed.

Expressing optimism about investor interest, Zar'e said that improved conditions and a possible revival of tourism in Fars Province could increase participation in these projects and contribute to the preservation and sustainable use of the province's historic heritage.

## Cultural continuity, economic potential in Izeh kilim weaving

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Kilim weaving, one of Iran's traditional flat-woven crafts, is a long-standing indigenous art industry of Izeh, Khuzestan Province.

In a note published on chn.ir, handicrafts researcher Abbas Rahimi wrote that the abundance of green pastures in Izeh's climate and access to livestock resources have created the necessary conditions for a supply chain of raw materials, including traditional spinning and natural dyeing, as well as the production of woven handicrafts.

The deep connection between Izeh kilims and Bakhtiari nomadic culture has helped preserve the authenticity of their designs and motifs. Despite changes in the form and use of this tradition — from traditional local applications to decorative and practical uses in contemporary life — the art has maintained its cultural identity.

Local motifs serve not only decorative purposes but also convey symbolic meanings rooted in religious beliefs, mythology, and indigenous worldviews. These designs often originate from the natural environment and everyday experiences, gradually evolving toward abstraction and simplification. The use of local natural and

plant-based resources in the dyeing process further preserves the authenticity of this practice and highlights the inseparable bond between Izeh kilims and their ecological setting.

Local access to raw materials such as wool, natural dyes, and mordants, along with specialized tools, has created a sustainable competitive advantage for this tradition. This has contributed to strengthening the local economy, supporting employment, and enriching the cultural identity of the region.

The designation of Izeh as Iran's National City of Kilim Weaving in 2025 marks a strategic achievement aligned with the objectives of the Khuzestan Handicrafts Department. The recognition aims to highlight the cultural importance and economic potential of this traditional craft.

From an academic perspective, the national registration of handicraft cities serves as an effective mechanism for branding, strengthening visual identity, and improving the competitiveness of products in domestic and international markets.

This achievement represents not only a major step toward introducing the regional brand but also creates opportunities for sustainable employment, preservation and transfer of indigenous knowledge, and the long-term develop-



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ment of handicrafts in the area. To achieve this status, the Khuzestan Handicrafts Department has spent recent years identifying, strengthening, and developing the necessary infrastructure for Izeh kilim weaving in production, marketing, promotion, training, and advertising. In the production sector, Izeh has become a major hub for kilim weaving, with more than 800 weavers working across

150 home-based workshops and 16 independent workshops. Over centuries, weavers' innovations have played a key role in the evolution of this practice, including reviving traditional spinning methods, producing naturally colored kilims, creating new motifs, and diversifying product uses.

Today, Izeh kilim products are distributed through various channels, including local markets and shops, provincial and national specialized exhibitions, and digital platforms. Key initiatives by the Khuzestan Handicrafts Department to promote and develop Izeh kilim weaving include obtaining more

than 20 national quality marks for handicrafts, preparing national standards, registering a geographical indication, and designing and producing product prototypes.

The transfer of kilim weaving skills in Izeh is based on a combination of indigenous traditions and modern educational systems. Many weavers continue to pass technical knowledge through the traditional master-apprentice system in home workshops, demonstrating the continuation of intergenerational learning. Alongside this approach, institutions such as the Technical and Vocational Training Organization and the Khuzestan Handicrafts Department provide free formal training programs from basic to advanced levels to standardize skills and improve quality.

The region's educational infrastructure currently includes seven active workshops at the Izeh Cultural Heritage Department, six official training centers, and large production workshops that combine commercial activity with the training of new artisans.

The Khuzestan Handicrafts Department has also used modern tools, including specialized workshops and educational films, to support standardization and expand technical knowledge among Izeh kilim weavers. Promotional activities for Izeh

kilim weaving are based on urban management strategies and cultural diplomacy. The Municipality of Izeh has played a significant role in raising the social status and strengthening the identity of this craft through environmental advertising, including promotional billboards, the installation of a kilim monument at the city entrance, themed murals, and naming a street after kilim weavers. Meanwhile, the Handicrafts Department has adopted an active display strategy by showcasing locally produced kilims in administrative buildings, public spaces, restaurants, cafés, and eco-lodges. These measures have helped introduce the product to local audiences and tourists, while transforming kilim weaving from a workshop-based activity into a visible and dynamic part of the city's cultural landscape.

The designation of Izeh as the National City of Kilim Weaving goes beyond an honorary title; it provides a strategic opportunity to strengthen the county's position on Iran's handicrafts map and support national and international branding. However, maintaining this achievement and fully benefiting from its economic and cultural potential requires updated policy-making and greater attention from relevant authorities to move from traditional production toward modern market management.