

Kolghah Zarrin excavations offer new insights into ancient Elymais Civilization

Iranica Desk

Archaeologists leading excavations at the historic Kolghah Zarrin site in Masjed Soleyman, Khuzestan Province, have underscored the site's importance for understanding the ancient Elymais Kingdom, urging continued research, sustainable conservation measures, and greater investment in cultural tourism. Speaking to CHTN, excavation director Ali Hozhabri said potential discoveries of architectural remains, rock reliefs, and petroglyphs could shed new light on the political, economic, social, and cultural foundations of the Elymaean state. "Rock reliefs are valuable not only for archaeology but also for understanding social organization, power structures, and cultural practices in ancient societies," Hozhabri said, noting that such studies can contribute to research in history, sociology, and anthropology. Archaeologist Ayoub Sol-

tani, another member of the excavation team, said social structures in ancient societies were shaped by relationships among individuals, groups, and social classes. Examining these structures through political, economic, social, and cultural perspectives can provide a deeper understanding of historical communities, he added. Soltani described Elymais as a powerful semi-independent kingdom that emerged in southwestern Iran during the Parthian era following the rise of the Seleucids. At its height, the kingdom controlled territories across present-day Khuzestan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Lorestan, Ilam, and parts of Isfahan Province. According to the archaeologists, independent coinage, control of key routes linking Iran to Mesopotamia, maritime trade in the Persian Gulf, and a strong agricultural economy formed the basis of Elymais' prosper-



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ity. The discovery of Elymaean coins in northern parts of the Arabian Peninsula further illustrates the kingdom's extensive commercial reach and strategic role in regional trade networks. The researchers identified Masjed Soleyman, along-

side Izeh, as one of the principal political and religious centers of Elymais. They pointed to the construction of ancient Iran's largest stone terrace, as well as numerous temples and ceremonial complexes, as evidence of the city's prominence.

Hozhabri and Soltani noted that the Kolghah Zarrin temple, which features motifs associated with Mithraic beliefs, may reflect the religious diversity and tolerance of Elymaean society. Beyond the discovery of sculpted busts, coins, and rock reliefs, the archaeol-

ogists stressed the importance of studying the site's architecture and pottery. Continued excavations, supported by adequate conservation measures, could provide unprecedented insights into the history and culture of the period, they said. The archaeologists also welcomed recent efforts by local authorities to develop cultural tourism around Kolghah Zarrin. Establishing a site museum, they argued, could increase visitor numbers, extend tourist stays, and contribute to the local economy. They emphasized that sustainable preservation depends on the active participation of local communities, private-sector stakeholders, and civil society organizations. Local NGOs, they said, can play an important role in strengthening social capital, attracting investment, and protecting both the tangible and intangible heritage of the region. The researchers further

suggested that institutions such as the oil industry and municipal authorities could contribute to the preservation and promotion of Masjed Soleyman's cultural heritage through their social responsibility programs. Among the main challenges facing urban archaeological sites, they cited conflicts with private landowners, urban development projects, and insufficient long-term monitoring. Raising public awareness, engaging local communities, strategic land acquisition, and strengthening heritage protection laws were identified as key measures for safeguarding these sites. Concluding their remarks, Hozhabri and Soltani said urban archaeological excavations not only help rescue endangered heritage but also deepen understanding of past civilizations while promoting a balance between urban development and the preservation of historical identity.

Isfahan tourism sector faces ongoing challenges



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The head of the Isfahan Association of Travel and Tourism Service Offices said the tourism market has yet to recover satisfactorily, with a combination of economic challenges, flight restrictions, and lingering social concerns continuing to suppress travel demand. In an interview with IRNA, Hossein Nasri outlined the factors behind the current downturn in the tourism sector, stating that one of the main reasons for declining travel demand is the financial pressure on households, coupled with significant increases in public transportation fares. Citing the example of rail travel, Nasri said ticket prices on heavily traveled routes such as Mashhad have risen to the point where round-trip travel for a family of four has become extremely costly. As a result, many citizens can no longer afford air or rail travel to more distant destinations.

Nasri also addressed the state of the aviation sector, noting that not all flight capacities have yet returned to service, particularly on domestic tourism routes such as Kish Island. He emphasized that a return to normal conditions following recent tensions will take time, describing tourism as a highly sensitive industry. Unlike some sectors that can quickly resume normal operations once a crisis subsides, the recovery of tourism depends on the reopening of airports, the restoration of flight services, and the resumption of visa-related operations at embassies — a process that is progressing gradually. The head of Isfahan's travel agencies association added that public uncertainty stemming from concerns about wartime conditions has also contributed to reduced willingness to travel. Despite the current challenges, Nasri expressed optimism about the near future, saying there are encouraging signs

that domestic and international airlines are preparing to resume services. Efforts are also underway to reopen visa service offices, developments that could help gradually revive the tourism industry in the coming months. He noted that short-duration and weekend trips, which generally rely less on air travel and are often undertaken by private vehicle or overland transportation, are currently performing better than large-scale domestic and international tour packages. While Tehran had entered serious negotiations with Washington, the United States and Israel launched attacks on multiple locations across Iran on February 28, 2026. The attacks continued in Tehran and several other cities, including Isfahan, until a ceasefire was announced in the early hours of April 8, 2026. After Tehran, Isfahan Province was reported to have been among the regions most heavily affected by the attacks.

War-damaged heritage sites in Kurdistan Province undergoing restoration

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Emergency restoration and protection work on historic monuments damaged during the recent US and Israel's war against Iran, including the Khosroabad Mansion and the Kurd House, has been completed, according to provincial cultural heritage officials. Ali Behnia, Deputy Head of Kurdistan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, announced that archaeological sites across the province suffered no significant damage during the conflict, and no noticeable increase in illegal excavations was reported. Speaking to ISNA about the post-war condition of the province's historical assets, Behnia said that activities have largely returned to normal. He noted that Khosroabad Mansion, the Kurd House, and the Moshir Divan Mansion were among the sites damaged during the war and are currently undergoing restoration. "Necessary emergency measures were carried out for all affected sites, and follow-up actions are underway at the ministry level," Behnia said. "We hope that once the required funding is secured, comprehensive restoration of the damaged sections can begin as soon as possible." According to Behnia, the damage included both structural and decorative elements, and

authorities are working to address the issues in the shortest possible time. Explaining the emergency measures taken, he said that each damaged building received restoration according to its needs. In cases where windows had been shattered or displaced, replacement glass was installed and other urgent repairs were completed.

supplies. Preliminary assessments have been completed, and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage is expected to adjust and allocate funding based on current market conditions. Regarding archaeological activities in the province, Behnia stated that no active excavations have been conducted in Kurdistan this year. However, a proposed excavation

damage to cultural heritage. Behnia emphasized the need for preventive measures, arguing that nationwide educational and cultural initiatives are essential to combat illegal excavations. He compared the issue to public awareness campaigns aimed at reducing littering, saying that long-term cultural education is the most



Khosroabad Mansion
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"These interventions were carried out as emergency restoration measures," he said. "More comprehensive and specialized conservation work will follow once the necessary funding is allocated." Behnia said that estimating the total cost of repairs remains challenging due to ongoing price fluctuations in construction materials, including wood and other essential

project at the Zagros Cemetery is currently under review and may be implemented with the participation of archaeological researchers if approved. Addressing concerns about illegal excavations during and after the war, Behnia noted that archaeological mounds and heritage sites are continually threatened by unauthorized digging, which can cause serious

effective way to achieve lasting results. He added that illegal excavations continue to occur in Kurdistan, as in other provinces of the country. While some offenders are arrested and prosecuted, Behnia argued that Iran's cultural heritage laws require revision and stronger preventive provisions to better protect historical assets from future damage.