

Alamut castle meets four UNESCO world heritage criteria

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The Alamut Castle and associated fortifications possess Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) by meeting four of UNESCO's World Heritage criteria, making the complex one of the most significant surviving monuments of the Seljuk era, according to a cultural heritage expert. Speaking to IRNA, cultural heritage researcher Jalil Golshan said the site's exceptional architecture, advanced defensive system, historical significance, and sophisticated engineering qualify it for inscription on UNESCO's World Heritage List. He added that a successful inscription would further strengthen Iran's cultural and civilizational standing on the international stage. Golshan explained that cultural and natural properties are evaluated for world heritage inscription according to internationally recognized criteria. A cultural property is eligible for inscription if it satisfies at least one of UNESCO's six cultural criteria, while meeting multiple criteria further enhances its significance



● IRNA

and nomination potential. He noted that all world heritage nomination dossiers are prepared through comprehensive historical, architectural, cultural, and scientific studies in accordance with UNESCO standards. Referring to the nomination dossier for the Alamut Castle and associated defensive fortifications, Golshan said the property satisfies four of UNESCO's world her-

itage criteria, placing it alongside some of Iran's most distinguished heritage sites, including Pasargadae, Takht-e Soleyman, and the Soltaniyeh Dome. According to historical sources, Alamut Castle dates to the Seljuk period and is closely associated with Hassan Sabbah. Built atop an inaccessible rocky mountain, the fortress once exercised influence over a vast area extending

beyond the Alamut region, although the valley itself served as its principal center. Golshan said the fortress was protected by four supporting castles, each assigned a specific role within a coordinated regional defense network. Together, these fortifications formed an advanced and integrated military system that made Alamut one of the most formidable strongholds in

Iran. He added that even during Timur's invasions, the fortress posed a significant obstacle to advancing forces and could not be captured easily. The expert also highlighted the site's remarkable engineering achievements, noting that its carefully designed water supply system, food storage facilities, defensive layout, and strategic troop deployment enabled the castle's defenders to withstand prolonged sieges without surrendering. One of the castle's most distinctive architectural features, he said, is its construction on a steep rocky summit. The highest section of the fortress served both as the primary defensive position and as the main base for its defenders, reflecting the builders' sophisticated understanding of military engineering, defensive strategy, and the natural landscape during the Seljuk period. Golshan also explained the distinction between tangible and intangible heritage within UNESCO's world heritage framework. Tangible heritage includes physical monuments, archaeological

sites, and historic architecture, while intangible heritage encompasses cultural traditions, rituals, and indigenous knowledge, such as Nowruz, Yalda Night, Ashura commemorations, and other living cultural practices recognized internationally. He stressed that world heritage inscription marks the beginning rather than the end of the conservation process. Effective site management, continuous monitoring, specialized conservation, and the use of UNESCO's technical and advisory expertise are essential for safeguarding inscribed properties. When necessary, he said, the World Heritage Committee can also facilitate international expert assistance, as it did during the restoration of Choghazanbil Ziggurat in the 1990s. Golshan concluded that world heritage inscription of Alamut Castle would not only reinforce recognition of the site's historical and architectural significance but also provide a strategic opportunity to showcase Iran's rich civilization, strengthen professional conservation efforts, and promote cultural tourism on the international stage.

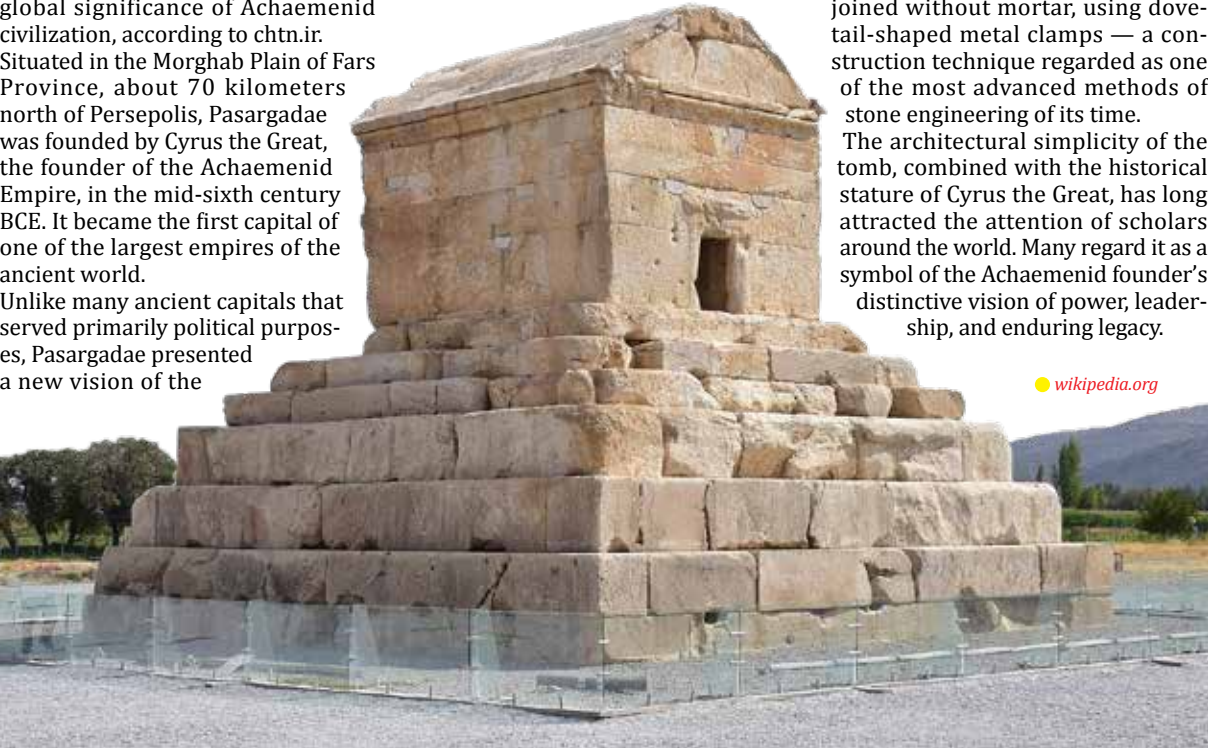
Pasargadae demonstrates origins of Persian Garden design

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In July 2004, the ancient city of Pasargadae was inscribed as Iran's fifth UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognizing not only the renowned Tomb of Cyrus the Great but also one of the world's earliest and most remarkable examples of royal urban planning, Persian garden design, monumental architecture, and state formation in the ancient world. Among Iran's UNESCO-listed sites, Pasargadae holds a special place as the first capital of the Achaemenid Empire and one of the most influential archaeological complexes in the development of Persian architecture, city planning, and landscape design, according to chtn.ir. During its 28th session, held in Suzhou, China, in July 2004, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee unanimously approved the inscription of Pasargadae as Iran's fifth World Heritage Site, further reinforcing the global significance of Achaemenid civilization, according to chtn.ir. Situated in the Morghab Plain of Fars Province, about 70 kilometers north of Persepolis, Pasargadae was founded by Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, in the mid-sixth century BCE. It became the first capital of one of the largest empires of the ancient world. Unlike many ancient capitals that served primarily political purposes, Pasargadae presented a new vision of the

relationship between power, architecture, nature, and urban planning — an approach that was later reflected in other Achaemenid royal complexes. The world heritage property encompasses some of the finest surviving examples of Achaemenid architecture, including the Tomb of Cyrus the Great, the Private Palace, the Audience Palace, the Gate Palace, the Royal Garden, stone watercourses, Tall-e Takht (the Citadel Terrace), the Tomb of Cambyses, the Sacred Precinct, the Mozaffari Caravanserai, and the Tang-e Bolaghi archaeological landscape. Archaeologists regard Pasargadae as one of the earliest known examples of an integrated royal capital, where architecture, the natural landscape, water-management systems, and gardens were designed as parts of a unified plan. One of the site's most significant fea-

tures is the Royal Garden of Pasargadae, which many scholars consider the earliest known example of the Persian Chahar Bagh (four-part garden). This design later inspired the creation of historic gardens across Iran, Central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and even parts of Europe. Its sophisticated water-management system, carefully planned network of stone channels, and harmonious integration of architecture with nature are among the defining characteristics that contribute to the site's Outstanding Universal Value. The most iconic monument at Pasargadae is the Tomb of Cyrus the Great, a limestone structure distinguished by its simple yet enduring architecture. The monument has withstood more than 2,500 years of natural and historical events. The tomb stands on a six-tiered stepped platform, with the burial chamber positioned at its summit. Massive limestone blocks were joined without mortar, using dove-tail-shaped metal clamps — a construction technique regarded as one of the most advanced methods of stone engineering of its time. The architectural simplicity of the tomb, combined with the historical stature of Cyrus the Great, has long attracted the attention of scholars around the world. Many regard it as a symbol of the Achaemenid founder's distinctive vision of power, leadership, and enduring legacy.



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Golil; North Khorasan Province's natural, nomadic heritage



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Nestled in the mountainous landscapes of North Khorasan Province, Golil is one of Iran's most pristine natural areas, renowned for its rich biodiversity, cool summer climate, and deep cultural significance among the region's Kurdish Kormanj nomads. Located north of Shirvan, Golil is a highland plain celebrated for its wildflowers, crystal-clear springs, ancient cypress trees, and diverse wildlife. The area is home to the urial wild sheep, golden eagles, partridges, and many other species, while its refreshing mountain breezes make it a popular summer destination. For generations, the nomadic communities of North Khorasan Province have regarded Golil as far more than a scenic landscape. The name has long appeared in their songs, oral traditions, and historical narratives, symbolizing their identity, homeland, and enduring attachment to the region. Golil is also closely associated with the province's frontier history and the sacrifices of local defenders who protected Iran's northeastern borders. Historical figures such as Sardar Eyvaz remain part of local memory, while sites including Darreh Khooni (meaning Bloody Valley) reflect the area's turbulent past and the resilience of its inhabitants.

According to local tradition, the word Golil means "the beautiful flower of the tribe" in Persian, reflecting the affection that nomadic communities have long held for the region. Each spring, its lush meadows and abundant vegetation have inspired local musicians and storytellers, while its flowing springs have provided a vital source of water for both residents and travelers. Today, Golil is recognized as a biosphere reserve, valued for its unspoiled ecosystems, remarkable plant and animal diversity, and unique ethnic and cultural heritage. The coexistence of rich natural resources with centuries-old nomadic traditions makes the area one of northeastern Iran's most distinctive landscapes. The reserve is also known as a habitat for the Caspian snowcock, the largest partridge species native to Iran. Local nomadic communities have proposed promoting the region as a Border Park of Peace and Friendship, highlighting its potential as a symbol of environmental conservation and cross-border cooperation. Golil Biosphere Reserve is home to approximately 300 plant species and 300 animal species, covering an area of about 144,000 hectares, making it one of Iran's most valuable protected natural areas.