

Soltaniyeh Dome displays grandeur of Ilkhanid era architecture



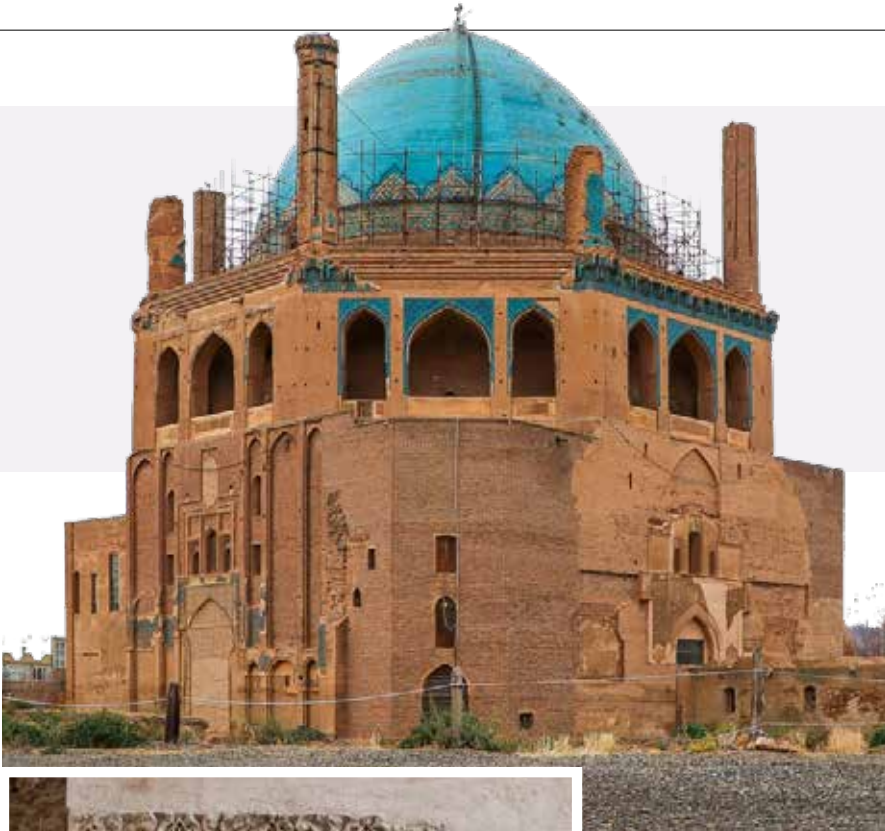
Iranica Desk Among Iran's UNESCO World Heritage sites, the Soltaniyeh Dome holds a distinguished place as one of the finest achievements of Ilkhanid architecture and one of the most remarkable examples of structural engineering, architectural design, and decorative art in the Islamic world. At its 29th session in 2005, UNESCO's World Heritage Committee inscribed the Soltaniyeh Dome as Iran's seventh World Heritage property, recognizing its Outstanding Universal Value and securing its place among the world's most important historic monuments, according to chtn.ir.

The city of Soltaniyeh, in Zanjan Province, became the capital of the Ilkhanid dynasty in the early 14th century under the rule of Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh, better known as Oljeitu, the eighth Ilkhan ruler. During this period, construction began on the monumental mausoleum that is today known as the Soltaniyeh Dome. Built between 1302 and 1312 CE (702–712 AH), the monument was one of the most ambitious architectural projects of its time. Drawing upon the expertise of Iranian architects and craftsmen, it became a lasting milestone in the history of world architecture. The monument's most striking feature is its monumental double-shelled dome, ris-

ing approximately 48 meters high with a span of nearly 25 meters. It remains the largest brick dome in the world and is widely regarded as a masterpiece of medieval engineering. Its innovative double-shell design, advanced structural load distribution, precise geometric proportions, and masterful use of brickwork have made the monument one of the greatest engineering achievements of the Middle Ages. Architectural historians believe that the engineering techniques employed in the construction of the Soltaniyeh Dome influenced the development of later large domed structures, including several landmark buildings of the Renaissance. The monument is also re-

nowned for its exquisite turquoise tilework, intricate brick decoration, delicate stucco ornamentation, Qur'anic inscriptions, geometric motifs, and masterful calligraphy, creating a harmonious blend of architecture, art, and spirituality. Its inscriptions, executed in Thuluth and Kufic scripts, feature verses from the Holy Qur'an and religious texts, adding exceptional artistic and spiritual value to the interior spaces. The octagonal layout, surrounding ivans, slender minarets, and carefully balanced spatial proportions are among the defining characteristics of the monument. Experts regard this geometric composition as a brilliant fusion of aesthetics and structural

engineering, providing both visual grandeur and remarkable stability that has enabled the building to endure for more than seven centuries. UNESCO inscribed the Soltaniyeh Dome on the World Heritage List in recognition of its Outstanding Universal Value, citing its architectural innovations, technical achievements, artistic excellence, and lasting influence on the evolution of both Islamic and world architecture. Today, the Soltaniyeh Dome stands not only as a symbol of the grandeur of Ilkhanid architecture but also as enduring testimony to the continuity of Iranian engineering, craftsmanship, and artistic traditions during one of the country's



most significant historical periods. Beyond the mausoleum itself, the historic landscape of Soltaniyeh preserves the archaeological remains of one of the most important urban centers of the Ilkhanid period. Excavations and historical studies indicate that the medieval capital once included royal palaces, administrative buildings, religious com-

plexes, bazaars, residential quarters, and an extensive network of fortifications, reflecting the city's political, economic, and cultural prominence during the height of Ilkhanid rule. Although much of the ancient city has disappeared over the centuries, ongoing archaeological research continues to provide valuable insights into its urban planning and architectural

development. Situated on the fertile Soltaniyeh Plain in present-day Zanjan Province, the region has been inhabited since at least the first millennium BCE, according to archaeological evidence. Its rich grasslands and strategic location contributed to its selection as the capital of the Ilkhanid dynasty in the early 14th century. Soltaniyeh is now one of Zanjan Province's leading cultural tourism destinations, where visitors can explore not only the magnificent UNESCO-listed dome but also the archaeological remains of the former Ilkhanid capital and other historic sites that preserve the legacy of one of medieval Iran's most influential cities.

Ancient Hesar-Dashtak road preserves legacy of Sassanid engineering

Iranica Desk Few experiences evoke the feeling of traveling through time quite like walking along a historic road. When that road dates back to the Sassanid era and the centuries that followed, the journey becomes even more extraordinary. Fars Province, widely regarded as the cradle of ancient Iranian civilization, is home to countless archaeological treasures from the Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sassanid periods, many of which have been inscribed on Iran's National Heritage List and the UNESCO World Heritage List. Among the province's most renowned historical landscapes is the Marvdasht Plain, where the ancient cities of Persepolis, Pasargadae, and Estakhr once flourished. Today, Persepolis, Pasargadae, Naqsh-e Rostam, and Naqsh-e Rostam are among Iran's best-known archaeological sites, attracting large numbers of domestic and international visitors, particularly during the Nowruz holidays and the summer travel season, according to IRNA. Yet these celebrated monuments represent only part of the region's rich cultural heritage. Numerous lesser-known sites continue to offer remarkable opportunities for visitors interested in Iran's ancient past. One of these hidden treasures is the historic Hesar-Dashtak Road, located in the mountain-



ous area of Dorudzan District in Marvdasht. The road lies approximately 600 meters north-east of Hesar village, on the slopes leading toward Dashtak village. The ancient route was first identified during a preliminary survey conducted in 2016 as part of the research project Study of the Achaemenid Royal Road from Susa to Persepolis. Although the road has not yet undergone comprehensive archaeological investigation, available evidence suggests that it dates to the Sassanid and early Islamic periods. Its present name is derived from the neighboring villages of Hesar and Dashtak, between which it extends. According to documentation prepared by the Fars Province's

Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, the road served as an important passage for local communities over several centuries and underwent repeated repairs and continued use throughout its history. Today, however, sections of the road have been damaged or destroyed by floods, landslides, and natural erosion. Despite these losses, substantial portions remain intact, offering adventurous travelers an opportunity to experience one of the region's most remarkable but little-known archaeological landmarks. Cultural heritage experts believe the road's greatest significance lies in its sophisticated engineering. Its builders carefully controlled the steep moun-



tain gradient, allowing travelers to ascend what is almost a vertical rocky slope with surprisingly little difficulty. Constructed from two types of limestone — dense dark-gray stone and softer cream-colored limestone — the historic route stretches for about 750 meters. It is generally around two meters wide, although certain sections narrow to approximately one meter. Because of the mountain's steep incline, stone steps were carved at regular intervals, each about 20 centimeters high. In one section, the rock face itself was cut to create elongated recessed steps measuring roughly 1.5 meters in length and 30 centimeters in width. Similar stairways can also be found along the historic roads of Firuzabad and

Khuyiz, as well as beside the Ab Darvazeh structure at Estakhr. Ancient Iranian engineers designed the road in a winding, switchback pattern to ease the ascent. Numerous stone terraces were constructed along the route to stabilize the mountainside and support the roadway. Natural cave-like cavities are also found beside the road. Some are naturally formed, while others were excavated and enlarged by human hands through carving the interior rock surfaces. One of these chambers measures approximately five by five meters, with a ceiling height of about two meters. Farther uphill, another series of steps has been carved directly into the rock. Unlike the earlier staircase, these steps are broad

and relatively flat, averaging about 180 by 45 centimeters with a height of roughly 25 centimeters. At one point, builders also cut into the mountainside to create a level platform that likely served as a loading or resting area. The upper sections of the road preserve their terraces and foundations more completely. Some retaining platforms reach heights of up to five meters, while protective stone parapets line much of the outer edge of the route. According to specialists, the Hesar-Dashtak Road represents one of the finest surviving examples of ancient Iranian engineering. Its builders successfully overcame an exceptionally steep mountainside through innovative design and careful construction. Walking along the road offers visitors a tangible connection with the past, following a route traveled by generations of Iranians more than a thousand years ago. Even in its weathered state, the surviving remains continue to convey the ingenuity and endurance of those who built and used it. Experts, however, warn that the monument is increasingly threatened by the expansion of the nearby villages of Hesar and Dashtak. Without effective conservation measures, continued development could cause irreversible damage to this unique archaeological heritage.