

From Nazr to service:

Story of offerings at Imam Reza’s shrine

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Guest contributor

INTERVIEW

The Nazr (a religious vow and offering) made by people at the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) is a vivid expression of their boundless trust in the revered Imam. This bond has endured through the centuries, gaining new depth and breadth. As rulers and dynasties have come and gone, the people’s heartfelt connection with the shrine has remained steadfast, making it a cherished refuge for their hopes, intentions and vows. Against this backdrop, one of the fundamental responsibilities of Astan Quds Razavi in managing donations is to honor that trust, faithfully uphold donors’ intentions and safeguard the revered status of the shrine in the eyes of the faithful. Alireza Esmailzadeh, director general of the Donations Department at Astan Quds Razavi, explained that the practice of making religious vows has deep roots in all divine religions. At the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH), written records of donations date back at least to 1111 AH. These documents show that donations have historically been registered according to specific intentions and used precisely for the purposes designated by donors. Throughout its history, Astan Quds Razavi has maintained its independence through endowments and public donations. He added that safeguarding donors’ intentions is the most important principle in managing donations. Whether in the

past or today, the intentions of an endower or donor are to be carried out exactly as specified. For both cash and in-kind donations, the process of documentation, recording the donor’s intention, allocating funds and monitoring begins as soon as a donation is received, with each endowment and donation assigned a specific code. Today, donations play a fundamental role in providing services to pilgrims and addressing social needs. A significant share of welfare, cultural, medical, livelihood and educational services — from



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providing meals to pilgrims to supporting vulnerable families and promoting reading — is funded and allocated according to donors’ intentions. Esmailzadeh said that more than 670 specific intentions have been defined through an intelligent donation management system. If a donor specifies a particular purpose, the donation is spent precisely along that designated path. For donations made without a specific purpose, the shrine’s



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porting population growth and assisting needy families to providing dowries and distributing food packages, clothing and stationery to children. Esmailzadeh said the shrine’s vast repository currently safeguards more than 1.3 million valuable objects, making it an unparalleled treasury of heritage. Light, humidity and temperature are continuously monitored, while conservation specialists inspect and monitor the objects on a daily basis. Among these treasures is a particularly distinctive form of

shrine describes as a spirit of knowledge and enlightenment to different parts of the city and the sacred precinct. In this sphere, donations find expression in books and religious teachings, from providing Holy Qur’ans and prayer books for pilgrims to supporting major scholarly projects. Donations also support conservators working to preserve rare manuscripts and have helped illuminate libraries in remote areas through the distribution of more than 100,000 books. In some of the country’s less-developed areas, the initiative has also led to the establishment of 32 Qur’anic centers and Qur’anic schools, bringing Qur’anic teachings to rural communities. Every year, more than 30 million pilgrims travel long distances to visit the shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH). Recognizing their need for safe and dignified places to rest along the way, Astan Quds Razavi has established a network of “Imam Reza cultural and welfare complexes” along major pilgrimage routes, designed to provide travelers with places to rest and regain their strength and peace of mind. Esmailzadeh noted that, so far, 23 roadside complexes have been built along major routes used by pilgrims and travelers. They are located in Khorasan Razavi, South Khorasan, North Khorasan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Kerman, Yazd, Semnan and Golestan Provinces and several other areas. Together, they cover nearly 30 hectares and include more than 30,000 square meters of built-up space, providing services to pilgrims and travelers.



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Imam Reza guesthouses. Every day, blessed meals are prepared using these donations and distributed among pilgrims at the Ghadir and Horr guesthouses. Esmailzadeh said that in recent years, donations have extended beyond the shrine precinct and into people’s everyday lives. The Razavi Keramat Foundation, as the executive arm of these initiatives, works to bring the benefits of donations to families in need. These services range from sup-

cultural donation known as the “Donation of Honor” (Nazr-e Eftokhar in Persian). Prominent figures in science and sport have donated years of achievements and prestigious medals to the shrine. Esmailzadeh said the collection includes 1,248 medals and gold awards, preserving both the national pride and achievements of the medal winners. During the final days of the lunar month of Safar, donations take forms beyond food distribution, bringing what the

Iranica Desk

Preparations are underway to nominate the historic windmills of Iran’s southeastern Sistan and Baluchestan Province for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List, with support from government institutions and local communities. Officials overseeing the nomination dossier say greater emphasis must be placed on documenting the structures and presenting their historical significance. They believe international recognition of the windmills could go beyond their physical preservation, helping strengthen social cohesion and create new cultural tourism destinations in southeastern Iran. According to IRNA, the windmills are among the oldest examples of indigenous architecture and engineering in Iran. Built to harness wind power for grinding wheat and other grains, the structures demonstrate how communities in the region adapted to their natural environment and used local climatic conditions to meet their everyday needs. The windmills were not simply tools for food production. They were an integral part of the local way of life, livelihood and economy in areas exposed to strong winds. In the past, windmills played a vital role in the lives of local communities, providing flour for households and villages and contributing directly to food security. At a time when industrial facilities were unavailable, such

Sistan and Baluchestan windmills set for UNESCO nomination



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structures formed a crucial part of the production and consumption cycle in many parts of Iran. They therefore represent an important chapter in the history of labor, ingenuity and innovation in the country. Their significance, however, extends beyond their economic function. The windmills are also highly valuable from a cultural, historical and architectural perspective. Their distinctive design, adaptation to local climatic conditions and use of indigenous materials make them notable examples of sustainable archi-

itecture. They are now regarded not merely as remnants of the past, but as a valuable form of cultural heritage that preserves part of Iran’s historical identity. The windmills hold particular significance in Sistan and Baluchestan, especially in the Sistan region, where they are recognized as important symbols of the area’s indigenous and historical heritage. Because of its climatic conditions and seasonal winds, the province is considered one of Iran’s important

centers of traditional windmill construction. Several examples of these historic structures remain standing in the region. Their survival is evidence of how local communities, through indigenous knowledge and ingenuity, adapted to a challenging environment characterized by strong winds and limited resources. Today, efforts to preserve the windmills represent more than the protection of historic structures. They are also aimed at safeguarding part of the region’s collective memory, local identity and ancient heritage. Conservation, restoration and promotion of the sites could help deepen understanding of the region’s history while creating new opportunities for cultural tourism in Sistan and Baluchestan. The windmills are located in the Hozdar tourism area near

Shahr-e Sukhteh, or the Burnt City. A roughly one-hour journey through the desert takes visitors to the area, where they can encounter evidence of an organized way of life dating back around 2,800 years. The presence of windmills alongside the remains of fortifications points to the area’s rich civilization and its historical role as a link between Sistan and other parts of Sistan and Baluchestan as well as neighboring provinces. The province’s Cultural Heritage Department has already registered the windmills on Iran’s national heritage list. Mohammad-Hadi Tehrani-Moqaddam, director general of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province, highlighted the importance of the windmills to the region’s en-

gineering heritage, describing them as symbols of the ingenuity of Sistan’s ancestors and their ability to adapt to the region’s distinctive natural environment. “Preserving these historic structures is not only about safeguarding our cultural identity; it is also a strategic step toward introducing the engineering achievements of this land to the world.” He said that, as part of the province’s conservation efforts, eight historic windmills have so far been registered on Iran’s national heritage list. In addition, 14 other windmills have been identified and documented in Hamun, Hirmand and Zabol. According to the official, the structures are now being prepared for inclusion in World Heritage nomination dossiers, with support from the provincial government and the involvement of relevant specialists. The windmills are among Iran’s oldest examples of indigenous engineering. For centuries, they harnessed the power of the wind to serve local communities, demonstrating how people in the region were able to develop efficient and sustainable technologies with limited resources. The structures have a particularly important place in Sistan and Baluchestan’s architectural and engineering heritage. Their long history and distinctive adaptation to the region’s climate make them a significant example of Iran’s indigenous technological heritage and a potential addition to the country’s World Heritage portfolio.