



Ancient 4,600-year-old board game unearthed in Iran's Burnt City

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian archaeologists unearthed a distinctive 4,600-year-old board game, an engraved bone comb and remarkably preserved organic remains during the 21st excavation season in the UNESCO-listed Burnt City in southeastern Iran, offering fresh clues to the social and cultural life of one of the third millennium BC's major urban civilizations, the excavation team's head Rouhollah Shirazi said. The discoveries, which also include traces of eggs, textiles and leather as well as previously undocumented burial forms, could open up new avenues for reconstructing daily life, technology, social customs and cultural links among the ancient inhabitants of the



273-hectare settlement near Zabol, CHTN reported. The latest excavation season began on July 20, 2026, and is focusing on three trenches, one in the residential

quarter and two in the cemetery. Work in the northeastern residential area uncovered two architectural phases alongside substan-

tial animal remains, tools, stone-working debris, plain and decorated animal figurines, and hearths. Shirazi said the evidence suggests the area was not

a purely industrial zone but also formed an important part of the inhabitants' everyday lives. The cemetery has yielded an especially diverse assemblage, including new burial types, plain and painted pottery, multicolored ceramics and organic materials rarely preserved for millennia. Among the standout finds is an unusual form of a board game dating to the third millennium BC. The discovery offers a fresh window into the "lesser-known" dimensions of social life and leisure at the ancient city, Shirazi said, underscoring that its inhabitants' lives extended beyond production and subsistence. Archaeologists also recovered an engraved bone comb unlike any previously found at the Burnt City.



Comparable specimens have been reported only at some sites in Central Asia, potentially offering new material for studying ancient craftsmanship, decorative practices, personal grooming and wider cultural interactions. The preservation of eggs, textile fragments and leather is another significant development. Such organic materials usually deteriorate over time, and their survival could allow researchers to examine ancient lifestyles, technologies, economies and consumption patterns more directly.

The Burnt City, located about 56 kilometers south of Zabol in Sistan, was a major center of the Helmand civilization. It was inhabited from the late fourth millennium BC through the entire third millennium BC across four cultural periods. The current season is also drawing on interdisciplinary research, including optically stimulated luminescence dating, radiocarbon dating, anthropological studies, ancient-DNA sampling and paleopathological analysis of human remains. Shirazi said integrating those findings with archaeological evidence could help researchers build a more precise picture of the ancient community's social organization, living patterns, technology, health and cultural connections.

Sao Paulo retrospective revisits five decades of Abbas Kiarostami's cinema

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Brazil's IMS Paulista cinema in Sao Paulo is showcasing five decades of Abbas Kiarostami's filmmaking, bringing a broad selection of the late Iranian director's work to Brazilian audiences from July 17 through September 27, IRNA reported Wednesday, citing the Kanoon Public Relations and International Affairs Department. The retrospective traces Kiarostami's artistic evolution and distinctive cinematic language through films spanning different stages of his career. It offers Brazilian audiences a window into the poetic world of a filmmaker whose work explored childhood, nature, everyday life and the human experience through an understated visual vocabulary. The program has already featured 'Colors' and 'The Experience,' followed by 'How to Make Use of Leisure Time: Painting (1977),' 'The Traveler,' 'The Bread and Alley' and 'Homework'. Later screenings include 'The Chorus,' 'The Wind Will Carry Us,' 'Tribute to the Teachers' and 'First Graders'. September screenings will bring some of Kiarostami's best-known works back to the screen, including 'Where Is the Friend's House?' on September 2, 'Life, and Nothing More...' on September 9 and 20, and 'Through the Olive Trees' on September 16 and 27. The IMS program also includes a wider retrospective running into December, with restored prints and additional titles. Kiarostami, who died in 2016, remains one of the defining figures of Iranian cinema. His minimalist storytelling and poetic treatment of ordinary life helped carry Iranian filmmaking to international audiences while preserving a distinctly Iranian cultural perspective. The São Paulo program provides a sustained platform for audiences to revisit that legacy and engage with a body of work that continues to shape contemporary cinema.



Ardakan National Water & Qanat Museum

From darkness of qanats to light of desert life



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INTERVIEW

Arts & Culture Desk

Despite its vast arid and desert regions, Iran is the birthplace of one of humanity's most remarkable inventions: The qanat, an ingenious system that brought water from the darkness beneath the earth into the light of everyday life. This engineering marvel, some examples of which date back 3,000 years, was far more than a means of extracting water. It embodied collective wisdom, social solidarity and sustainable living in the heart of the desert. Researchers regard Iran as the principal cradle of this valuable technology, while UNESCO has inscribed the Iranian qanat as a World Heritage site. Against this backdrop, the historic city of Ardakan in Yazd Province, once home to one of Iran's highest concentrations of qanats, now has a specialized national museum dedicated to water and qanats. The Ardakan National Water and Qanat Museum opened in June this year and houses a unique collection of qanat excavation tools, historical documents and correspondence belonging to qanat diggers, as well as artefacts associated with Iran's water and qanat culture. The museum offers researchers and tourists a rare opportunity to delve into the several-thousand-year history of qanats and water distribution in Iran. Its collection includes numerous valuable and historic artefacts, from a 900-year-old pickaxe and traditional lighting devices to 500-year-old handwritten documents by qanat diggers. Set within the earthen architecture of



traditional adobe houses, these objects tell the story of the relentless efforts of desert communities to find water deep beneath dry rock and soil.

Water history preserved

The museum's origins date back to an earlier collection that held a license for the preservation and display of tools and equipment associated with water and qanats. As the collection expanded and new artefacts were added, it secured an official license this year from Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts to operate as a national museum. The full name of the institution is the Ardakan National Water and Qanat Museum. It was brought into operation with the support of experts, archaeologists and officials from Ardakan's cultural heritage and tourism authorities. The collection includes tools used to excavate qanats, including old pickaxes, well wheels and com-

passes, along with various types of traditional lighting equipment such as oil lamps, pistol lamps and carbide lamps. The museum also preserves more than 2,000 old manuscripts and documents, including correspondence between qanat diggers and owners dating back 400 to 500 years. Its oldest artefact is a grooved pickaxe which, according to carbon dating, is more than 900 years old. In total, 284 documented and valuable artefacts have been registered and preserved at the museum.

500-year-old walls, 700-year-old water access

The complex comprises two sections: the museum and a traditional guesthouse where tourists, particularly researchers specializing in water structures, can stay overnight. The accommodation section has approximately 320 square meters of floor space, while the structure at its entrance dates back 500 to 600 years. It also contains a payab,

a traditional access point to underground water, estimated to be 700 years old. A qanat passes through this section of the complex. Remarkably, the adobe and mud used to build the house were prepared with water from that very qanat. The museum section of the complex formerly served a commercial purpose and, according to archaeologists, is more than 400 years old.

800-year-old qanat beneath museum

The qanat running beneath the complex is known as the Mortin Qanat. Its endowment deed indicates that it is more than 800 years old. Unfortunately, the qanat dried up in the early 1980s because of successive droughts and poor management of water resources, and no water now flows through it. When the Mortin Qanat was still flowing, it was home to a fish locally known as qezel-juqi, which residents caught for consumption. Historical accounts also refer to another species, commonly known as the blind white fish, that once inhabited qanats. Because of the darkness deep inside these underground channels, the fish lacked functional eyesight and became known as blind fish. Old accounts point to the presence of these fish in the region, although no one has seen one for many years. Qanat ecosystems also supported other forms of wildlife. White-shelled snails were found in freshwater qanats, while green-shelled snails inhabited qanats carrying saltwater. Large numbers of rock doves also nested deep inside qanats, forming part of the animal life that once thrived within these remarkable underground waterways.