

Iranica Desk

The city of Anbaran in north-western Iran is seeking international recognition for its distinctive kilim-weaving tradition, following its designation in 2020 as Iran's "National City of Kilim." With around 3,500 kilim weavers, the city is now being considered for international recognition.

Most of Anbaran's residents are Sunni Muslims of the Shafi'i school. The city's neighborhoods developed from three former villages: Upper Anbaran, Lower Anbaran and Amin Jan.

Kilim weaving remains a thriving activity in Anbaran, with many families engaged in the craft. The city has gained considerable recognition as Iran's National City of Kilim and is considered to have strong potential for international recognition.

The delicate and skilled hands of Anbaran's kilim weavers bring vibrant colors to their looms, interlacing the weft to create patterns rich in memories and local traditions. Each kilim evokes a world of images, dreams and memories.

According to Yaser Ranaei, public relations director of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Ardabil Province, the National City of Kilim is one of the province's major centers for handicraft production. Around 5,000 handicraft artists in the city are engaged in producing kilims and other handmade products.

Anbaran's kilim weavers work both in workshops and individually, Ranaei said, adding that their products represent a major capacity for the handicraft sector in Ardabil Province.

"Given the existing potential, efforts are underway to turn Anbaran into a World Craft City, and its application is nearing completion," he said. "Some infrastructure needs to be developed and facilities provided, and support from senior provincial and national officials could help pave the way."

Ranaei said around 30,000 handicraft artists work in 60



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fields across Ardabil Province. Anbaran kilims, he added, have much to offer in terms of form, design, color, quality, marketing and consumer appeal, and have earned a distinctive reputation. In addition to kilim weaving, Ardabil is known for a range of handicrafts, including leatherwork, filigree, Namin marquetry, jeweled and stone marquetry from Khalkhal, Jajim weaving, carpet weaving, Palaz weaving, Verni weaving, glass cutting, Masnad weaving, pottery, knife making, engraving and mosaic tilework.

Jalil Jabbari, director general of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Ardabil Province, has announced plans to revive Anbaran's handicrafts building and establish the secretariat of the National City of Kilim there.

"The handicrafts sector and artists of the National City of Kilim need support," Jabbari said. "Plans are underway to facilitate the activities of handicraft artists, particularly in cities designated as national handicraft cities."

He added that every available opportunity and facility would be used to improve working conditions for artisans. Training programs on kilim weaving and its motifs are also planned to preserve the authenticity of the craft. "However, if handicraft artists are not active and cooperative, our efforts in this field will be meaningless," he said.

Jabbari said plans are also in place to hold various exhibitions, particularly the National Handicrafts Exhibition of Ardabil, where Anbaran's artisans



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will be invited to showcase their work and further promote the region's kilims.

Experts describe Anbaran kilim as one of the most distinctive handwoven crafts of Ardabil Province. Rooted in local traditions, it is known for the authenticity of its raw materials and its distinctive motifs.

The kilims are made from high-quality wool obtained from local sheep and dyed with natural plant-based colors, including madder, walnut husks and indigo. These materials give the textiles durability, softness and strong colorfastness.

Anbaran kilims are produced using a flat-weaving technique with a dense arrangement of warp and weft threads, giving them strength and a long service life for everyday use. Their

motifs are geometric and improvised, with designs inspired by nomadic culture and local symbolism and created without predetermined patterns.

The combination of natural materials, dense weaving and improvised geometric designs has made Anbaran kilim one of the most authentic and distinctive handwoven traditions in the region.

Ebrahim Sepidkar, head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department of Namin, said plans are underway to seek international recognition for Anbaran kilim. Around 3,500 kilim weavers with individual or workshop production licenses are currently active in the city.

He said the application for international recognition of Anbaran kilim is being prepared and finalized, adding that UNESCO

— the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization — has identified several criteria and indicators that Anbaran must meet for international recognition.

Some of these requirements, he said, involve naming the city's streets and parks after kilim-related designs, colors, names, terms and motifs. These measures are currently being pursued and implemented.

Other requirements concern the authenticity of the designs and motifs used in Anbaran kilims, he added.

Now, fragrant and colorful Anbaran is preparing for its bid for international recognition, hoping to showcase its authentic and historic art and culture and bring greater global attention to Ardabil Province and Iran.

Izgam Dasht reveals centuries of human settlement in western Mazandaran

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Izgam Dasht, an archaeological site in western Mazandaran Province, has once again become a focus of specialized research into the region's historical and cultural past during the third season of archaeological excavations. Evidence dating from the Bronze Age to the Islamic period has been uncovered at the site, while the latest research, including absolute dating, genetic studies and the identification of part of the cemetery, is paving the way for broader excavations and the development of a site museum.

Mohammadreza Khal'atbari, head of the archaeological excavation team at Izgam Dasht, said the site is considered one of the key archaeological sites in western Mazandaran and that evidence from excavations conducted in 2017 and 2023 provides a picture of the continued presence and settlement of human communities there across different historical periods.

He added that, based on carbon-14 dating, communities associated with the Middle Bronze Age, dating to between 1600 and 2000 BCE, as well as the Iron Age, dating to between 500 and 1500 BCE, and later historical and Islamic periods have been



identified at Izgam Dasht.

"These findings further underscore the importance of the site in reconstructing the cultural and historical developments of western Mazandaran," he said. Khal'atbari noted that the findings from the first excavation season were published in a book titled Ramsar in the Context of History. He said the archaeological discoveries are valuable not only for understanding the region's settlement cultures but also for reconstructing aspects of the social and cultural history of communities that lived in western Mazandaran.

Referring to plans for protecting

and introducing the archaeological site, Khal'atbari said Izgam Dasht has been designated as a site museum since 2023 in view of the significant remains and evidence uncovered there. Measures including defining the site boundaries, proposing a protected zone and preparing its registration dossier have been completed, paving the way for its inclusion on Iran's national heritage list.

He emphasized that designating Izgam Dasht as a site museum is intended to link the protection of the archaeological site with continued research and the presentation of its cultural



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achievements to the public. The initiative could transform the site from a purely research-oriented area into an active cultural and tourism asset in western Mazandaran.

Khal'atbari said the third season of excavations is aimed at completing previous studies and developing a more comprehensive picture of the human communities that inhabited the site. One of the main objectives is to conduct absolute dating on human remains discovered at Izgam Dasht.

Genetic studies of the human remains are also being conducted to shed new light, using modern

scientific methods, on the biological and population history of the communities associated with the site.

The excavation team has also located part of the site's cemetery, Khal'atbari said, adding that identifying and mapping sections of the cemetery will provide a basis for designing broader excavations and making more precise plans for the construction and development of the site museum.

He said the current research program is being conducted through an interdisciplinary approach, involving specialists in archaeology, physical anthro-

pology, biological anthropology, architecture and design. This approach will allow researchers to study the findings more comprehensively and reconstruct various aspects of the lives, social structure and biological characteristics of the communities that inhabited Izgam Dasht.

Khal'atbari said the studies and research carried out during the latest excavation season seek to go beyond identifying and documenting archaeological remains and reconstruct aspects of the culture and civilization of the human communities associated with the site.

The archaeological significance of western Mazandaran is rooted in a long history of human settlement along the southern shores of the Caspian Sea. The region's fertile valleys, forests, rivers and proximity to the Alborz Mountains created favorable conditions for human communities from prehistoric times onward. Archaeological research has documented settlements and cultural remains from the prehistoric periods through the Bronze and Iron ages and into the historical and Islamic periods, although the archaeological record of western Mazandaran remains less extensively studied than that of some other parts of the Caspian region.