

Iranica Desk

The fourth National Walnut Festival was held in Kolowr town, the center of Shahrud District in Khalkhal, with tourists from various provinces, producers and local residents attending the event, which aimed to promote the area's agricultural and tourism attractions.

According to IRNA, the mayor of Kolowr said the festival had received a warm welcome from visitors from Gilan, Zanjan, Ardabil, East Azarbaijan, Tehran and Alborz provinces.

Morteza Motahari added that, following years of efforts, the festival was included in the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts' national events calendar in 2024, turning Kolowr into a hub for cultural exchange among different ethnic groups.

He said specialized exhibition booths and the introduction of local artists provided a valuable opportunity to showcase the area's natural and historical attractions and promote eco-tourism in the ancient Shahrud region.

Fourth National Walnut Festival draws tourists to Kolowr

The representative of Khalkhal and Kowsar in the Parliament also described the festival as an important step toward introducing the southern parts of Ardabil Province and their attractions.

Vahid Kan'ani said the region's natural resources and potential had not been adequately promoted. He stressed the need to develop infrastructure and attract investors to make better use of the agricultural and tourism potential of Khalkhal and Kowsar.

The head of Khalkhal's Agricultural Jihad Department announced that more than 3,500 tons of walnuts had been harvested from Khalkhal's productive orchards this year. Hassan Nourmohammadi said Khalkhal produces 60

percent of Ardabil Province's walnuts, with an average yield of 2.5 tons per hectare.

He identified annual rejuvenation pruning and top-working of approximately 50 hectares of old trees, the replacement of existing trees with varieties resistant to cold and drought, and the expansion of more than 100 hectares of grafted orchards as key measures to sustain and increase walnut production in the region.

The festival featured local music and performances, along with 25 booths offering various walnut varieties, orchard products, organic rural produce, traditional breads and sweets, and handicrafts.



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Khoy highlights Shams Tabrizi's role in transforming Rumi

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The Shams Tabrizi Mausoleum in Khoy, West Azarbaijan Province, has reopened after a two-decade hiatus, offering a gathering place for mystics, literary figures and admirers of Shams and Rumi from around the world, particularly from Iran and Konya, Türkiye.

Shams Tabrizi was a mystic and literary figure whose ideas shone like rays of sunlight into Rumi's soul, transforming the course of the poet's life. Before meeting Shams, Rumi was a scholar and Islamic jurist who taught religious sciences at four renowned madrasas. Following their encounter, however, he moved away from teaching and preaching and turned to poetry and the mystical practice of sama, a form of spiritual listening and movement.

Shams encouraged Rumi to remain silent, regarding silence as one of the essential stages of the mystical path. Rumi's change in



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behavior and lifestyle, and his devotion to Shams, astonished those around him. His companions, prominent figures and even close associates struggled to understand him. His practices alongside Shams prompted some who had known him to turn against him. Sensing that the atmosphere had become

hostile, Shams left Konya without warning after 16 months. Eight centuries after Shams's passing, and following a two-decade hiatus in construction, his mausoleum reopened in Khoy on October 7, 2026, to serve as a meeting place for admirers of the two great mystics from Iran and Konya.

Shams Tabrizi occupies an exceptional place in the history of Iranian mysticism. His name is most closely associated with the intellectual and spiritual transformation of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi, widely known as Rumi.

The encounter between Shams and Rumi in Konya gave rise to one of the most significant narratives in the history of mysticism and Persian literature. Yet Shams's significance extends beyond his relationship with Rumi. He embodied questioning, passion, the pursuit of truth and the rejection of habitual ways of thinking. Perhaps this is why writers, philosophers and enthusiasts of mysticism have continued to explore his life and ideas for centuries.

With Khoy now home to the final resting place of this great mystic and literary figure, the city has an opportunity to present itself to the world as Shams's homeland and a cultural gateway to Iran. The world

should know that Iran gave rise to the mystic and thinker who transformed Rumi's intellectual world, leading him away from teaching and preaching toward the heights of Persian literature and mysticism.

Shams cannot be understood merely in the shadow of Rumi's towering legacy. Sometimes, to understand a summit, one must return to the source that changed its course.

Khoy, the city of Shams, represents a gateway to Iran's cultural heritage, history and traditions. The world should recognize the centuries of literature, mysticism, poetry and thought connecting Shams, whose name is associated with Iran, and Rumi, whose legacy is closely linked to Konya. This exceptional cultural asset requires strategic planning to be transformed into social and economic capital.

Three principles informed the architectural design of the mausoleum: the wisdom of Iranian

architecture, geometry and nature. The central memorial space features a distinctive vertical structure that connects with sunlight at its highest point.

The initial design proposed installing a sun-tracking mirror at the top of the central structure to direct sunlight toward Shams's memorial stone in the prayer space. The concept illustrates how light can become more than a natural element and form part of an architectural narrative. The project also sought to use light and shadow to create a distinctive spatial and symbolic experience.

The mausoleum was designed not merely as a memorial site but as a cultural and research complex. Alongside the main memorial space, the plans include an exhibition hall, an auditorium, a research library, study areas and accommodation for researchers, allowing the complex to support ongoing cultural and academic activities. The project covers a total area of 7,000 square meters, including 3,500 square meters of buildings and landscaped grounds.

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The historic quarter of Dehdasht, known as Belad-e Shapur, is one of the most significant heritage sites in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province in southwestern Iran. Recent archaeological excavations indicate that settlement at the site dates back around 7,000 years. However, the failure to establish a legally approved protected zone, the loss of historic land, inconsistent funding and a lack of tourism infrastructure are threatening the future of the national heritage site.

Located south of modern-day Dehdasht, the historic quarter takes its name from Shapur I, the Sassanid king to whom the founding of a city in the area is attributed. The complex includes more than 2,000 houses, four major mosques, a historic bazaar, a caravanserai, seven public bathhouses, a school, a water reservoir and a water supply network, according to chn.ir.

The site was registered as a national heritage monument on August 18, 1985. It originally covered more than 40 hectares, but extensive sections have been lost to the expansion of the modern city. Today, approximately 35 to 37 hectares remain.

Until 2025, the history of Belad-e Shapur was largely associated with the Safavid and broader Islamic periods. However, the site's

7,000 years of history at risk in Belad-e Shapur

first research-oriented stratigraphic excavation has provided a new perspective on its history. Zabihollah Masoudinia, an archaeologist who has spent more than two years studying the historic quarter, said excavation findings point to a long and continuous history of settlement.

"The results indicate continuous, long-term occupation beginning in the fifth and sixth millennia BCE and continuing through the Elamite, Parthian, Sassanid, Safavid and Qajar periods," he said. Masoudinia added that the site's uppermost archaeological layer dates to the Qajar period. While most of the surviving architecture belongs to the Islamic era, pre-Islamic finds consist mainly of pottery, metal and stone objects. He noted that the largest excavation trench measured just three by three meters.

Archaeological investigations at the site began in the 1990s under Ahmad Azadi and continued through nine excavation seasons until 2004, focusing on some of the city's most important structures. In 2008, the site was surveyed as part of a broader archaeological assessment of Kohgiluyeh.

Hossein Sepidnameh carried out



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debris removal and excavation work along the southern and western sections of the enclosure surrounding the citadel's administrative complex during two seasons, in 2020 and 2022. In 2021, Masoudinia conducted test excavations and stratigraphic studies to reassess the site's boundaries and protected zone.

According to Masoudinia, establishing the site's official boundaries and protected area is the most urgent step towards safeguarding the historic quarter.

The previous boundaries, drawn up in the 2000s, were based on the conditions and planning assumptions of the time and lacked sufficient precision. A reassessment was completed in 2021,

and the report was submitted to the provincial cultural heritage authorities in 2022 for follow-up. The proposed protected zone covers nearly 300 hectares, most of it comprising agricultural land behind a hill and extending towards the village of Borj-e Ali Shir. Special restrictions on building heights have been proposed for the area.

Aliasghar Atashfaraz, deputy for cultural heritage at the Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, confirmed the scale of the proposed zone, saying the boundary and site assessment report had been prepared and sent to the ministry.

Ministry experts raised a number of objections during several rounds of review, all of which were subsequently addressed by the research team, he said.

Atashfaraz added that technical review meetings had been repeated several times because of the site's sensitivity. Authorities are now awaiting a final meeting to approve and formally announce the proposed boundaries. Masoudinia stressed that the proposed zone cannot serve as the basis for effective protection or planning until it has received official approval and been formally notified.

The archaeologist attributed the reduction in the historic quarter's area — from approximately 44 hectares, or 40 hectares according to some accounts, to around 37 hectares — to construction and encroachment.

He also cited inappropriate restoration work and changes of use carried out without adequate expert assessment, attributing these problems to the absence of a comprehensive restoration plan.

The site's natural setting has also suffered damage in recent decades. This deterioration, combined with the lack of baseline data on the sequence of

settlement, represents a major obstacle to the site's potential inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Other challenges include irregular and unreliable funding, which has disrupted archaeological research, and the absence of basic tourism facilities, including temporary accommodation and clearly defined visitor routes. As a result, Belad Shapur has not become a regular stop on major tourist itineraries.

Drawing comparisons with historic cities such as Fez in Morocco and Bukhara in Uzbekistan, Masoudinia said the site's future depended on the simultaneous development of four key areas: scientific research, appropriate restoration, community participation and sustainable tourism. He also called for a comprehensive management plan, reliable long-term funding and an annual program of archaeological excavations.

Community involvement, he said, remains a missing link in efforts to preserve the site. Local residents must have access to education and economic opportunities linked to the historic quarter if they are to develop a lasting sense of ownership and attachment to it. Private-sector investment would also be difficult to attract unless the government first provided the necessary infrastructure, he added.