

Iranica Desk

Izeh, a treasure trove of the ancient civilizations of the central Zagros, has made fresh progress over the past year in archaeological research, the protection of historic sites and the documentation of heritage assets. These efforts, alongside the preparation of more than eight dossiers and the development of management plans for historic sites, are opening up new prospects for safeguarding the region's rich cultural heritage. Sadeq Sheikhi, head of the Archaeology Unit at the Khuzestan Province's Cultural Heritage Organization and director of the National Heritage Site for the Cultural and Historical Landscape of Izeh, wrote in an article that protecting Izeh's historical heritage requires not only scientific research but also coordinated planning, adequate funding and cooperation among the relevant authorities. With archaeological remains spanning the Paleolithic and prehistoric periods through the Elamite, Parthian-Elymaean, Sassanid and Islamic eras, Izeh is one of the central Zagros region's most significant archaeological areas. Its prominent rock carvings and historic sites offer considerable potential for advancing understanding of Iran's history

Izeh advances efforts to protect historic sites



and cultural identity. Preserving this heritage, however, requires a sustained, long-term strategy rather than a series of isolated interventions. One of the major initiatives undertaken over the past year has been the preparation of management plans for Izeh's historic sites. The plans are designed to identify conservation, restoration and research needs, organize access routes and establish the practical requirements for man-

aging each site. The installation of lighting infrastructure and CCTV cameras at Kul-e Farah is among the measures implemented as part of this approach. However, protecting historic sites requires more than technical measures and expert assessments. Unauthorized interventions, limited financial resources and the need for legal and judicial support remain major challenges, requiring closer cooperation among executive bodies and the

institutions responsible for heritage protection. Izeh's historical heritage is a public asset, and the responsibility for preserving it cannot rest solely with specialists and cultural heritage authorities. Alongside conservation efforts, the preparation of more than eight dossiers concerning site boundaries and buffer zones, as well as the registration of historic artifacts, structures and archaeological sites, has been cited as another achievement of the Aya-

pir National Heritage Site over the past year. The dossiers were compiled using the expertise of the team, without a separate dedicated budget. Continuing this work, together with the establishment of a pottery database, research into natural heritage and periodic site monitoring, could further expand scientific knowledge of the region. Nevertheless, Izeh's inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List cannot be achieved simply

by increasing the number of dossiers or carrying out a handful of site-improvement projects. The process requires well-documented research, effective conservation, integrated site management, adequate financial resources and the participation of local communities. Coordination among the responsible institutions and the translation of expert plans into sustained practical action are essential to advancing this goal. Today, more than ever, Izeh needs a long-term vision for its historical heritage — one that regards archaeological remains not merely as relics of the past, but as assets underpinning cultural identity, scientific research and sustainable regional development. The progress made over the past year could lay the groundwork for further advances, but achieving the desired results will depend on maintaining these efforts and providing effective support for conservation and research programs. Securing World Heritage status for Izeh would mean more than gaining an international designation. It would offer an opportunity to ensure the lasting protection of a valuable chapter of Iran's history — a goal that requires a shared commitment from experts, officials, responsible institutions and the local community.

Reading Room

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Iran's vehicle registration history dates back to 1926, when the country's first automobiles began arriving. At the time, a set of 32 regulations governing vehicle registration was drafted. The rules were finalized in 1929, three years after the cars' introduction, and required vehicles to display five separate plates. The book "The First Number Plate: A History of Vehicle Registration in Iran, from Its Origins to the Introduction of National Plates" has been published by the Cultural Museums Institute of the Mostazafan Foundation, in collaboration with the Traffic Police Applied Research Center. The publication examines the history of vehicle license plates in Iran, from the arrival of the first automobiles and the establishment of early registration systems to the introduction and adoption of national plates. Its contents draw on historical research, documentary evidence and authoritative sources, particularly archival materials held at the Iran Classic Car Museum, according to IBNA. At first glance, a vehicle license plate may appear to be little more than a combination of numbers, letters or symbols used to identify a vehicle. Like a fingerprint, it must be unique. Viewed more closely, however, a license plate can also serve as a historical record, reflecting the technological, administrative, social and even political changes of its time. The evolution of license plates in Iran began with the arrival of the first motor vehicles more than a century ago. Since then, their structure, function, identification systems and physical appearance have undergone numerous changes. The book seeks to retrace this history and bring together knowledge that has previously appeared only in

Book traces history of license plates in Iran

scattered and limited references. In the book's foreword, Hamidreza Soleimani, managing director of the Cultural Institute of Bonyad Museums, outlines the publication's main themes: "The study begins with a brief account of the arrival of the police and the emergence of early traffic-control systems in Iran, noting that the development of license plates cannot be separated from the establishment of institutions responsible for urban order and traffic management. It then traces the physical evolution of plates, from the earliest simple designs to modern national plates. Their materials, colors, dimensions, lettering, distinctive markings and graphic features are examined in detail. "Another key section classifies plates according to type and use, including private, government, public-service, military and ceremonial vehicles, as well as the technical and administrative requirements associated with each category. These classifications, the foreword notes, help explain not only the structure of registration systems but also how vehicles were organized and managed in different historical periods. "The book also reviews selected traffic and vehicle-registration laws and regulations to clarify the legal and administrative framework governing license plates." Soleimani says the need for the publication arose from the limited attention previously given to the subject. Until now, the history of Iranian license plates has generally been covered only briefly, in individual chapters of various books. This research gap prompted the compilation of a comprehensive account intended to shed

light on a relatively overlooked aspect of Iran's contemporary history. The earliest vehicle-numbering efforts in Iran predated the arrival of automobiles. During the premiership of Vosough al-Dowleh in 1919, numbered plates were attached to horse-drawn carriages and carts un-

either embossed or painted in clearly distinguishable colors. Municipal officers were tasked with regularly patrolling major routes and fining vehicles that lacked plates or displayed damaged or defaced ones. The initiative marked one of the earliest steps toward a for-

mal system for registering and identifying vehicles in Iran, a system that would later expand and become more sophisticated with the arrival of automobiles. The country's first automobile license plates date back to 1926, when the first cars were introduced. A set of 32 registration regulations was drafted that year and finalized in 1929. Under the rules, each vehicle was required to carry five separate plates: the manufacturer's name, the owner's address, a rear number plate, a front number plate and a tax plate. As the number of automobiles increased, the need to revise the regulations became apparent. By around 1929, when the number of private cars in the city had reached 1,522, the plate format was changed. The new design featured the city's name alongside a four-digit number displayed above it, replacing the earlier system. This change marked the beginning of a series of developments that would continue as motorized transport expanded, eventually leading to a modern vehicle-registration system in Iran. During the First Pahlavi era, the formal establishment of the traffic police helped drive efforts to replace the fragmented system of multiple plate formats with a standardized, recognizable design. In the early years of automobile use in Iran, registration was largely local and temporary. Municipalities and government agencies issued plates according to their own needs, with no comprehensive nationwide system in place. This fragmentation created difficulties in monitoring traffic, identifying vehicles, handling violations, preventing theft and

collecting taxes. With the establishment of the police administration and, subsequently, the traffic police, the government recognized the need for a unified and standardized system and began planning plates with consistent specifications. The first official registration standards introduced defined plate dimensions, called for metal rather than less durable materials such as wood or cardboard, and required legible letters and numbers that could be read from a reasonable distance. The shift represented a fundamental transition from rudimentary, fragmented local numbering to a more systematic, legally regulated and nationwide approach to vehicle registration. It also laid the groundwork for the more advanced, integrated national systems that followed. During the 1950s and 1960s, a sharp increase in domestic vehicle production, imports of foreign cars and intercity travel ushered in a new phase in Iran's license-plate system. Urban and provincial registration codes emerged, with each city or province identified by a designated letter or number. Tehran, for example, was associated with the letter "T," while Isfahan was identified by the number "1." Four- or five-digit numbers were then assigned to vehicles in registration order. The geographic coding system was designed to make vehicles easier to identify throughout the country. It quickly became part of everyday culture, with plate codes developing into recognizable symbols of urban identity. Beyond identification, the system played an important role in compiling vehicle statistics, collecting taxes, monitoring traffic and pursuing road violations. It became one of the most significant stages in the evolution of vehicle registration in Iran.

