

Iranica Desk

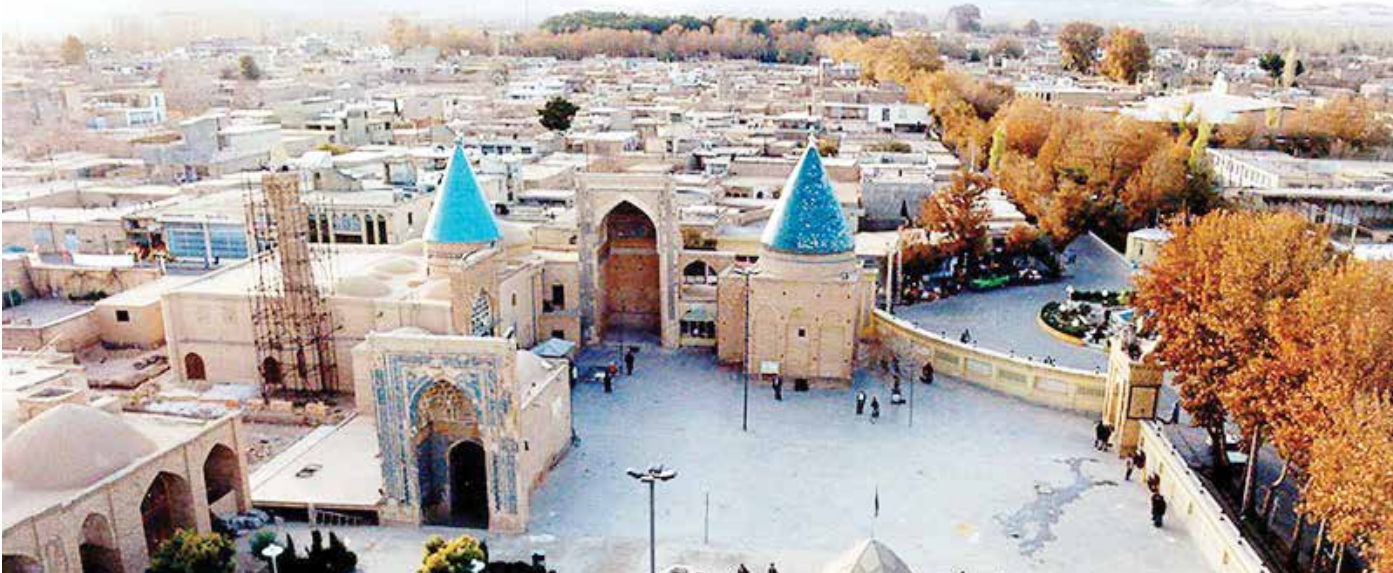
The long-standing bid to secure UNESCO world heritage status for the historic Bastam Complex in Shahrud, Semnan Province, may be entering a more active phase, as local heritage officials call for stronger provincial coordination and high-level decisions to overcome obstacles to its inscription.

Seyyed Mohammad Sadegh Razavian, head of the Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts of Shahrud, described the bid as an 18-year-old demand, stressing that the removal of barriers requires coordinated efforts among provincial authorities and relevant government agencies.

Talking to ISNA, Razavian said the site's world heritage inscription was of considerable importance and should be placed among the region's top priorities.

He noted that the Cultural Heritage Department had pursued parts of the process, but said further progress would depend on broader provincial support, cooperation among relevant institutions and strategic deci-

Bastam heritage bid seeks breakthrough after 18 years



sion-making. Razavian also referred to efforts to appoint a manager for Bastam's World Heritage nomination dossier, expressing hope that the appointment would pave the way for more serious follow-up and help resolve outstanding issues after nearly two decades.

He emphasized that advancing the nomination would require

a firm commitment at the provincial level and coordination meetings among the agencies involved.

According to Razavian, efforts are continuing through various channels to remove obstacles and move the nomination forward.

Bastam is one of the prominent historical complexes in Shahrud, with structures dating from the pre-Seljuk period through the Qajar era.

The complex includes the shrine of Imamzadeh Mohammad ibn Ja'far al-Sadeq, the mausoleum of Bayazid Bastami, Bayazid's monastery and mosque, the Ol-jaitu, the mausoleum of Ghazan Khan, a Seljuk-era mosque and minaret, the Jaame Mosque, the Kashaneh Tower and the Shahrokiyeh School.

Razavian highlighted the architectural significance and distinctive beauty of the site's historic buildings, underscoring the importance of securing international recognition for the complex.

Whether the latest efforts will finally overcome the longstanding obstacles to Bastam's World Heritage inscription remains to be seen.

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A cultural heritage expert in Bushehr Province has highlighted the historical significance of the Persian Gulf, describing the province's specialized and historical museums as valuable resources for showcasing Iran's maritime history, trade, culture and civilization in the region.

Mojtaba Mohammadi, referring to the long-standing presence and influential role of Iranians in the Persian Gulf, said protecting the tangible and intangible heritage of the region

Bushehr's museums show Persian Gulf's rich history, culture

was essential to preserving its historical and cultural identity.

He stressed the importance of introducing historical monuments, archaeological sites, maritime traditions and cultural heritage associated with the lives of coastal communities.

Pointing to the province's museums, Mohammadi identified the Persian Gulf Regional Museum, the Persian Gulf Medical History

Museum, the Maritime Trade Museum, the Anthropology Museum, the Rais Ali Delvari Museum and the Siraf Pars Museum as important venues for presenting different aspects of the region's history and civilization.

He said these museums, through the collection, preservation and presentation of historical artefacts and accounts, help younger generations and tourists gain a deeper understanding of the

region's maritime heritage, seaborne trade, indigenous culture and the role of Iranians in the Persian Gulf.

Mohammadi also emphasized the need to continue protecting and restoring the region's historical monuments and safeguarding its intangible heritage. He called for greater use of the province's cultural and museum resources to pass this valuable legacy on to future generations.



West Azarbaijan emerges as key region for Paleolithic research

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West Azarbaijan Province is an important region for studying the history of human presence in Iran during the Paleolithic period. Its numerous caves and archaeological sites have yielded stone tools, animal remains and evidence of ancient toolmaking technologies, offering valuable insights into the lives of prehistoric human groups and their adaptation to different environments.

Behrouz Khanmohammadi, an archaeologist with the West Azarbaijan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, has highlighted the province's key Paleolithic sites and their significance for understanding the history of early human settlement in northwestern Iran.

One of the earliest archaeological investigations into Iran's Middle Paleolithic period was conducted by Carlton Coon at Tamtaman Cave, approximately 20 kilometers north of Urmia. Coon, who had excavated several caves across the Iranian Plateau, investigated the site and uncovered animal remains alongside a number of stone artefacts.

The animal remains consisted mainly of deer and gazelle, although remains

of zebra, wild horse, wild boar and vulture were also identified. These discoveries provide evidence of the fauna present in the area and contribute to understanding the environmental context of human activity during the Middle Paleolithic.

Fragments of a femur found at the cave initially led Coon to suggest that the bones might belong to Neanderthals. Subsequent examinations, however, established that they belonged to deer. Based on the available evidence, the assemblage is tentatively attributed to the Middle Paleolithic and dates back at least around 40,000 years.

The Shiwatoo site near Mahabad is among the significant Lower Paleolithic sites in West Azarbaijan Province and the southern Lake Urmia region. Located approximately seven kilometres southwest of Mahabad on a terrace of the Mahabad River, the site covers an estimated area of one hectare.

Shiwatoo was identified and investigated through archaeological surveys, including work by a joint Iranian-French team and research conducted by Rahmat Naderi and Ali-pour. A considerable number of stone artefacts were

collected and transferred to the National Museum of Iran.

Analysis of the artefacts' technological and typological characteristics has raised the possibility that the site contains evidence of an Acheulean industry. Associated with the Lower Paleolithic, this stone-tool tradition spans an approximate period from 700,000 to 300,000 years ago.



Tamtaman Cave
● IRNA

The site could help researchers better understand the distribution of early human groups and investigate possible routes through which they moved from western regions into the interior of the Iranian Plateau.

The Shahrkand site was discovered in 2006 in southern West Azarbaijan. It is situated on a terrace of the Simineh River, which forms part of the Lake Urmia drainage basin.

Although only a limited number of stone artefacts have been recovered at Shahrkand, their technological and typological characteristics can be compared with finds from Shiwatoo near Mahabad. Researchers have therefore raised the possibility that the site dates to the Lower Paleolithic. Further investigation could help clarify the distribution of sites

to the identification of stone artefacts in Milan site. The assemblage consists of four separate concentrations containing approximately 100 stone tools and other stone artefacts.

Based on their technological characteristics, the finds have been attributed to the Middle Paleolithic. Their study could provide additional information about stone-tool production and the distribution of human groups in northern West Azarbaijan.

Another site, Kasehgaran village in Piranshahr, has yielded stone tools attributed to the Middle Paleolithic. The artefacts were recovered during rescue excavations associated with the Kani Sib Dam project. The discoveries highlight



A stone from Shiwatoo site
● tarikhema.org

from this period around the southern shores of Lake Urmia.

In Maku, recent surveys led

the importance of archaeological investigations across the province, particularly in areas at risk

of disturbance from infrastructure and development projects.

The Takab and the surroundings of Takht-e Soleyman are also important for Paleolithic research in West Azarbaijan. Surveys by Saman Heydari Guran and Elham Qasidian led to the identification of two open-air sites containing evidence of Middle Paleolithic activity near the historic Takht-e Soleyman complex.

Stone artefacts recovered from the sites display characteristics of the Mousterian industry, a tradition associated with Neanderthal toolmaking and other human populations of the Middle Paleolithic. The assemblages also contain flakes produced using the Levallois technique, a specialized method of preparing stone cores to produce flakes of controlled shapes and dimensions.

The sites' elevation is another notable feature: both lie at more than 2,300 metres above sea level, placing them among Iran's high-altitude Paleolithic sites. Their investigation could help researchers understand how prehistoric human groups occupied and adapted to mountainous environments.

Evidence from caves and

open-air sites across West Azarbaijan underscores the province's importance for studying human presence and activity during the Paleolithic. The geographical diversity of these locations, from plains and river terraces to high mountain areas, provides opportunities to examine how early human groups adapted to different landscapes.

Further analysis of stone artefacts, animal remains and the geographical settings of the sites could shed light on ancient toolmaking technologies, subsistence strategies and patterns of human movement during different prehistoric periods. Comparisons with archaeological evidence from neighboring regions could also help researchers investigate possible connections between human populations in West Asia and the interior of the Iranian Plateau.

Continued fieldwork, more precise dating of archaeological finds and the protection of prehistoric sites remain essential to advancing research into the region's early human history. The evidence uncovered in West Azarbaijan Province could contribute significantly to a broader understanding of the earliest stages of human settlement in Iran.