

## Persian Marvel Lost for Millennia (IV)



In 480 B.C., Persian sailors exiting the canal on the peninsula would have gazed upon Mount Athos from this perspective, before their boats resumed the westward journey.

ATHENS (National Geographic) -- Since few detailed descriptions of Xerxes Canal (except those from Herodotus) have survived to the modern age, the idea prevailed that his claim was an exaggeration or an out-right invention. The mystery of the canal's existence lingered for millennia. In the 19th century, interest blossomed in ascertaining whether traces of Xerxes' canal could be found. Marie-Gabriel-Florent-Auguste de Choiseul-Gouffier (1752-1817) was a French count who served as ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Passionate about ancient Greek history, he traveled the Aegean Sea aboard a frigate and in 1809 published the second volume of his chronicle Picturesque Journey through Greece, in which he argues that a canal had once existed, cutting straight through the Mount Athos Peninsula. He even drew up a plan showing the measurements and sections in accordance with Herodotus' account. The romantic tone of his travelogue, however, and the absence of any rigorous scientific method led to his claims being dismissed.

In 1847, the Royal Geographical Society of London published topographical studies carried out by the sailor and geologist Thomas Spratt. These scientific findings did seem to corroborate the existence of the canal as described by Herodotus. What had seemed a typically tall tale was now gaining plausibility, but it would not be until the end of the 20th century that actual proof of the canal would begin to come to light.

In 1809, the French diplomat and traveler Count Choiseul-Gouffier explored the northern Aegean and argued for the existence of the Xerxes Canal.

From 1991 to 2001, a multidisciplinary team of British and Greek geophysicists, topographers, and ar-

chaeologists worked extensively on the site. It was a major collaboration involving the National Observatory of Athens, the British School of Athens, and universities in Leeds and Glasgow in the UK and Patras and Thessaloniki in Greece. Benedikt Isserlin, from the University of Leeds, and later Richard Jones, from the University of Glasgow, directed the decade-long project.

On the Isthmus of Corinth, the spit of land that links the Peloponnese Peninsula to the mainland, researchers have uncovered evidence of boats supported on wooden cylinders or wheeled platforms, which would have been dragged by slaves or animals along a stone causeway from one coast to the other. Isserlin wanted to first check whether such a causeway existed on the Mount Athos Peninsula and consider whether it could explain how Xerxes' fleet had made the crossing. When no evidence of such a causeway came to light, the team went ahead with geophysical tests to see if they could locate a canal.

Exciting initial results showed there had indeed been some kind of ancient excavation in the middle of the peninsula, about 50 feet above sea level and some 65 feet deep. Taking into account that the sea level of the Mediterranean has risen more than three feet in the last 2,500 years, the team calculated that the depth of the seawater in the channel would then have been about 10 feet. They drilled nine boreholes, which allowed them to analyze the layers of the sub-soil. In the upper section (about 30 feet down), they found several ancient layers of silt. Then came a vital clue below that: a dense bed of reddish solidified sand extending for just over a mile. Here were the canal's foundations—a wide, solid base.

## Several World Species Released to Mark Migratory Bird Day



TEHRAN -- In keeping with the World Migratory Bird Day, Iran has held a ceremony to release several bird species.

The ceremony was held at the Lar National Park, located in the central Alborz Mountain Range and near the foothills of Mount Damavand.

It was nothing short of spectacular, with the presence of media

members, environmental enthusiasts, and locals.

The ceremony aims to celebrate the importance of biodiversity conservation and recognize the vital role of migratory birds in our ecosystem.

The event was not just a celebration of the release of birds but also a reminder of the importance of preserving nature.

# Iranians Mark National Day of Ferdowsi

TEHRAN -- Ordibehesht 25 in the Iranian calendar corresponding with May 15 is the National Commemoration Day of the renowned poet Ferdowsi, the influential Persian poet and author of the Persian epic, the Shahnameh.

A commemoration ceremony was held at Tous Cultural Complex near the tomb of the great poet, with a group of people and officials in attendance.

President Ebrahim Raisi said the great "open-hearted and free-thinking" Iranian poet revived the Persian language and the history of Iran, noting that his commemoration will help promote the Iranian-Islamic identity.

"Undoubtedly, commemorating this prominent poet and introducing his precious personality and works to the society, especially the young generation, will greatly help promote the Iranian and Is-



lamic identity and self-confidence, develop and deepen common language and national empathy as well as regional solidarity," he said in a message.

The greatness of Ferdowsi, the president said, is in his heroic perseverance in creating the national epic of the Islamic Iran.

The president described Iran as a

"cultural and spiritual truth in the heart of the ancient continent of Asia", which connects the East to the West.

The administration supports researchers and professors in the direction of institutionalizing the thoughts of great figures like Hakim Ferdowsi in order to promote the rich Iranian culture, he

added.

Ferdowsi was born in 940 CE in a small village near Tous. He is best known for his magnum opus, Shahnameh (Book of the Kings), which is a classic in epic Persian poetry and recounts Iran's mythical and historical past.

The book, which had a great influence on the nation's cultural heritage, chronicles the legendary history of the pre-Islamic kings of Iran from Keyumars to Yazdegerd III.

Ferdowsi spent over three decades writing the book in Persian at a time when Arabic was the main scientific and literary language of Iran.

Shahnameh is composed of 55,000 couplets and has been translated into several languages.

Every year, Iran pays tribute to its great poet on National Ferdowsi Day marked on May 15.

## 'World War III' Wins Two Awards at Vietnamese Festival



TEHRAN -- Iranian movie 'World War III' has won two awards at the Danang Asian Film Festival in Vietnam.

The 'World War III'

grabbed the special jury award and the best actor award at the 2023 edition of the film festival.

Directed by Houman Seyyedi, the film tells the

story of Shakib who has lost his wife and child in an earthquake.

He works in a place where a movie on the World War is being filmed, and when one of the actors collapses, Shakib has been chosen as his stand-in.

Shakib is allowed to stay in the actor's fake mansion, on condition that he doesn't receive any visitors, but he makes a decision that endangers his fate.

The film is co-written by Seyyedi, Arian Vazir-Daftari, and Azad Jafarian.

The 'World War III' re-

ceived its international premiere at the Venice International Film Festival in Italy. It took part in the festival's Orizzonti section and managed to grab two awards.

The DANAFF is jointly organized by Vietnam Association of Film Promotion and Development (VFDA) and Da Nang Municipal People's Committee, with the support of the Network for the Promotion of Asia Pacific Cinema (NETPAC).

This year's edition of the festival was held on May 9-13.

## 'Sampo' to Compete in U.S.; 'Cocoon' Goes to Italy

TEHRAN -- Iranian short flick 'Sampo' will compete in the Oscar qualifying DeadCENTER Film Festival in the U.S.

Directed by Marzieh Riahi, the 13-minute flick will hit the screen at the Live Action Short competition program of the 23rd edition of the event.

"To make ends meet, a mother caters for funerals and parties, but her daughter has a different idea about her mother's job," a brief synopsis for the film reads.

Linda Kiani, Maryam Boubani, Hilda Kordbache and Hannan Azizi comprise the cast list of the short flick.

Previously, the film took part the Palm Beach International Film Festival in the U.S., which is among the top independent film events in the world.

The lead character of the film, played by Kiani, and its director have already cooperated in the festival-favorite renowned short film 'Driving Lessons'.

The deadCENTER Film Festival, hailed as one of the Top 20 Coolest Film Festivals in the World by MovieMaker Magazine, is an annual independent film showcase that highlights more than 100 indie films from across the country.

The event will be held on June 8-11, 2023.

Meanwhile, the Iranian short

film 'Cocoon' will go on screen at Italy's 40th Asolo Art Film Festival in its first international appearance.

Directed and written by Saeed Bojnoordi, 'Cocoon' is the story

of a child called Mousa who suffered a nervous shock during the aerial bombardments of the war. He gradually weaves a mental cocoon for himself and avoids others, but the bud of love changes

his life path.

The 40th edition of the Asolo Art Film Festival will be held on June 16-18, 2023. Created in 1973, Asolo Art Film Festival is the oldest festival dedicated to art films.

## Picture of the Day



Poor precipitation and the lack of fodder and water had forced Azerbaijani nomads in Iran's northwest to start their spring migration to summer areas such ahead of time. However, they were caught off guard by heavy snowfall on the 56th day of spring.

Photo by Fars