

Excavations Uncover Millennia of Settlement in Iran’s Malekshahi Region



Image of the ancient cemetery created with artificial intelligence

TEHRAN – Recent archaeological surveys in Iran’s Malekshahi county in Ilam province are shedding new light on long-term patterns of settlement, burial customs, and ritual life in the Zagros region.

According to Habibollah Mahmoudian, a prehistoric archaeology specialist, fieldwork across several ancient cemeteries indicates that burial traditions—ranging from pit graves to jar burials and family tombs—reflect significant cultural and ritual transformations over millennia and confirm sustained habitation during the Iron Age.

Mahmoudian notes that the breadth of material from these sites, spanning both the Bronze and Iron Ages, highlights the continuity of human occupation and cultural development in this region.

“The archaeological remains demonstrate a deep and persistent sequence of settlement,” he explains, “with cultural markers that anchor Malekshahi firmly within the historical landscape of western Iran.”

Chama Cemetery: Pit Graves of Iron Age

Located roughly 700 meters east of the Ilam Dam reservoir, the Chama Cemetery contains numerous pit graves arranged irregularly across the terrain. Most graves are encircled by dry-stone walls made from unworked river cobbles, forming compact burial enclosures. The largest grave recorded here measures 6 meters by 1.5 meters, with a depth exceeding two meters—indicating substantial labor investment and suggesting complex burial practices during the Iron Age.

Amma Cemetery: Bronze Age Traditions South of Imam Village

Situated 300 meters south of the village of Imam, the Amma Cemetery features pit graves similarly enclosed by dry-stone constructions. Cultural markers and ceramic assemblages from this site date it to the Bronze Age, particularly the early first millennium BCE. Sherds recovered from the cemetery correspond to typical Bronze Age traditions found across the central Zagros, reinforcing the site’s chronological place-

Theater Artist Sarina Razagh Marandi Passes Away at 31

TEHRAN -- Sarina Razagh Marandi, a rising figure of Iran’s theater community known for her work as an actress, assistant director and production planner, has died at 31.

The news was confirmed by the Iran Theater House, which announced that Razagh Marandi passed away on Tuesday. Born in 1994, she built a notable body of work in a brief but prolific career on stage.

Razagh Marandi earned recognition for performances in productions such as *Death of a Mouse* and *Chocolate Foreign Style*, drawing praise for her range and stage presence. She was also honored at several festivals, including the Tehran Provincial Theater Festival and the International Children and Youth Theater Festival, receiving awards in acting, directing and playwriting.

In a statement, Iran Theater House expressed condolences and paid tribute to the young artist, noting: “Her memory and presence on stage will remain forever in the collective heart of the artistic community.”

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Meleh-Kav: Jar Burials and Cultural Connectivity

West of Mehr village lies Meleh-Kav Cemetery, notable for its jar burials—a practice paralleled in Parthian contexts and broader western Iranian mortuary traditions. These ceramic burial containers point to far-reaching cultural connections and shared ritual norms across the region, suggesting that Malekshahi participated in wider networks of funerary practice during antiquity.

Kalak Sarab: Family Tombs From Bronze Age

One kilometer southeast of Kalak Sarab village, archaeologists have identified a Bronze Age cemetery constructed with pit graves lined or covered by cobbles, large stones, and monolithic slabs. The presence of family tombs is particularly significant, offering insights into kinship structures and social organization among ancient communities of the Zagros highlands.

Kalak Naghi: Geometric Pottery and Distinctive Burial Patterns

The Kalak Naghi cemetery, located one kilometer west of the village, contains pit graves bordered by dry-stone walls of natural cobbles. Unlike neighboring sites, most burials here are individual rather than family-based. Pottery from the site—characterized by geometric motifs in cream on red slip—firmly situates the cemetery within the Bronze Age cultural horizon.

Fajr Film Festival Wraps With Major Wins From Hungary to Palestine

TEHRAN — The 43rd Fajr International Film Festival drew to a close, with a star-studded awards ceremony at the Honar Shahr Aftab Cineplex.

The evening brought together Iranian cultural officials, international guests, and industry figures for a celebration of global cinema, artistic achievement, and cultural dialogue.

Among the attendees were Iran’s Minister of Culture Abbas Salehi, head of the Iranian Cinema Organization Raed Faridzadeh, and Fars Province Governor Hussein Ali Amiri. The ceremony also paid tribute to acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Reza Mirkarimi, honoring his longstanding contributions to national and international cinema.

This year’s festival showcased 46 films across its competitive strands — International Competition, Eastern Vista, Future Frame, and Broken Olive Branch — representing a wide spectrum of filmmaking voices from around the world.

International Competition

A jury featuring acclaimed director Nuri Bilge Ceylan and cinematogra-



pher Mahmoud Kalari awarded top honors to Lesson Learned from Hungary. Directed by Balint Szimler and produced by Gabor Osvath and Zoltan Martonffy, the film took home the Crystal Simorgh for Best Film.

The Best Director prize went to Martin Pavol Repka for his Czech drama *March to May*, while the Best Script award was presented to the Russian writing duo Elena Kiseleva and Andrey Konchalovskiy for *Look at Me*.

The Best Artistic Contribution award recognized rising actor Ahmed Malek

for his performance in *My Father’s Scent*, a multinational production spanning Egypt to France. Japan’s *River Returns*, directed by Masakazu Kaneko, earned the Special Jury Award.

Eastern Vista (Asian Panorama)

Russia’s *Where the White Cranes Dance*, directed by Michael Lukachevsky, claimed the Crystal Simorgh for Best Film, with the jury praising its lyrical craftsmanship.

The Special Jury Award went to *The Settlement*, a co-production from

Egypt, Qatar, Germany, France, and Saudi Arabia, directed by Mohamed Rashad.

Iranian filmmaker Behnoush Sadeghi won the Crystal Simorgh for Artistic Contribution for *Calm Man*, cited for her skillful orchestration of performance, cinematography, and production design. A Special Mention was awarded to the Indian feature *In the Belly of a Tiger*, directed by Jatla Siddhartha.

Future Frame (Debut Films)

In an unusual outcome, the top prize was shared between two films, with the award’s cash prize split evenly.

- Tunisia’s *Round 13*, directed by Mohamed Ali Nahdi and produced by Melik Kochbati

- *Two Faces of Autumn*, a co-production between Iran, Australia, and Canada, directed by Ronak Taher and produced by Amir Parvin Hosseini

Sri Lankan director Lalith Rathnayake received the Special Jury Award for *Riverstone*.

Broken Olive Branch (Cinema of Resistance and Human Rights)

A highlight of the festival, the *Broken* (Continued on Page 7)

Tracing the Legacy of Women Artists in Iran

TEHRAN -- Throughout history, the story of art has largely been written by men and for men. Women’s contributions, when acknowledged at all, have often been relegated to footnotes or private collections.

Yet, in Iran—as in much of the world—female artists have long played a pivotal role in shaping visual culture, even if their names rarely appear in textbooks.

The Safavid era (1501–1736) offers some of the earliest documented examples of women artists in Iran. Among them, Sahifeh Banu stands out. Only three of her works survive: a scene of a half-finished building with laborers at work, a depiction of a public cemetery, and a portrait of Shah Tahmasp I. She is celebrated as one of three notable women painters of the Indian miniature

tradition.

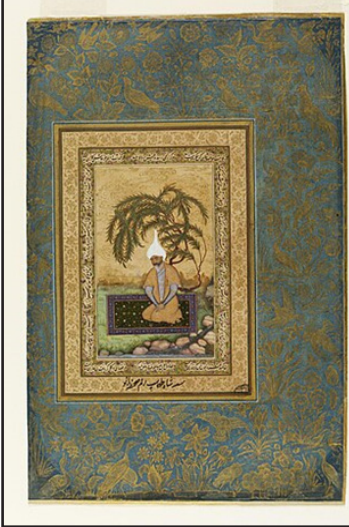
Another Safavid-era artist, Nadereh Banu, trained under the renowned master Aqa Reza Jahan-giri. Her surviving works, signed with the phrase “Amal Nadereh Banu bint Mirtaghi, student of Aqa Reza,” reflect the growing, though still limited, opportunities for women in elite households. Nadereh Banu traveled to India with her father to refine her craft, a rare journey for women of her time.

Real changes in women’s access to art education emerged more prominently during the Qajar period (late 19th century). Expanding girls’ schools and social movements such as the Constitutional Revolution (1906–1911) created pathways for women outside the royal court to pursue artistic training. Yet, for much of the period,

women’s artistic expression remained tied to class and social status, with most prominent female artists emerging from elite circles.

Fath-Ali Shah Qajar, a noted patron of the arts, encouraged the presence of artists and poets at court. Women of the royal household, including his daughters Zia’ al-Saltaneh, Umm Salameh, and Navab Alieh, produced some of the most significant artworks of the era. A particularly unique artistic form, known as naqashi nakhoni or “nail art,” flourished in Qajar courtly culture. Fakhr Jahan Khanum, the Shah’s sixth daughter, created miniature paintings and calligraphy using only her fingernails, works now preserved in the Golestan Palace collection.

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A work by Sahifeh Banu – a miniature of Shah Tahmasp I

Turkey, Uzbekistan Praise Iranian Cinema, Push for Co-Production Deals



Shukhratulla Rizaev, head of Uzbekistan’s Cinema Agency

TEHRAN — Cross-border collaboration took center stage at the 43rd Fajr International Film Festival, where senior film officials from Uzbekistan and Turkey highlighted plans to deepen cinematic ties with Iran.

Shukhratulla Rizaev, head of Uzbekistan’s Cinema Agency, praised the festival’s standing on the global circuit and revealed that talks are underway to launch joint productions—particularly large-scale historical epics.

Rizaev said Uzbekistan is “actively pursuing the production of historical works,” adding that such projects could be undertaken collaboratively with Iran, Kazakhstan, and other regional partners.

“We hope Iran will join us. We share a common history, a common civilization,” he noted, pointing to figures like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) as major potential subjects for co-pro-

duced films.

Rizaev emphasized that the historical and cultural ties between Iran and Uzbekistan—once part of a unified Greater Khorasan—make joint cinematic storytelling both natural and necessary.

He also expressed admiration for acclaimed Iranian directors such as Majid Majidi and Asghar Farhadi, describing them as artists whose work has influenced Uzbek filmmakers.

According to Rizaev, Uzbekistan has invited Iran’s Cinema Organization to visit Tashkent to further develop collaboration across theatrical releases, streaming platforms, and talent exchange initiatives.

“Iranian cinema and Iranian artists have a strong follow-



Tamer Karadaghi, Turkish actor and president of the Turkish Theatre Association

ing in Uzbekistan,” he added, noting that Uzbek institutions

plan to host Iranian filmmakers for workshops and training programs.

Meanwhile, Turkish actor and president of the Turkish Theatre Association, Tamer Karadaglı, echoed similar sentiments about the potential for deeper cultural partnership.

In his first-ever visit to Shiraz, Karadaglı praised the

city’s historic architecture and expressed admiration for Iranian cinema, calling it “a cinema that has found its own language in the world.”

He stressed that collaboration between Iran and Turkey “should have begun much earlier,” given the two nations’ cultural affinities and shared artistic ambitions.

Karadaglı added that festivals like Fajr provide essential opportunities for Iranian and Turkish filmmakers to engage directly.

“In Turkey, we often talk about Iranian cinema because it’s a cinema worth discussing,” he said. “There is real potential for a promising future together.”

Picture of the Day



Iranians gather at the tomb of Mirza Kuchak Khan Jangali in Soleymán-Darab, Rasht to mark the 104th anniversary of his passing.

Photo by IRNA