

Thieves Ruin Traces of History

Valuable Relics Found in Valiran

Plundering of ancient sites by illegal excavators, who are in the hunt for antiquities, would surely destroy traces of national history.

In an interview with IRNA, a member of Iran Archeological Research Institute, Ali Sadraei, stated that heritage looters inflict irreparable damage on national treasures.

Sadraei, who is deputy head of the excavation team at Valiran historic site in Damavand, near Tehran, explained that smugglers who ransack sites in the pursuit of golden artifacts tear down all stratigraphic layers and obliterate relics.

"In the course of their unlawful diggings, the looters damage priceless tiny relics which cannot be retrieved unless through professional excavation techniques."

The so-called gold-hunters impair archaic stone inscriptions under the illusion that they contain gold, he regretted.

Turning to archeological studies underway at Valiran, Sadraei noted that excavations are coming to an end and protection of the site would start in the near future.

He elaborated that archeologists had come across a lot of unique artifacts in the course of recent studies.



Valiran historic site in Damavand, northeast of Tehran

Sadraei, head of the Islamic Era Department of the institute, stressed that the boundaries of the site, registered on the National Heritage List, need to be delineated to separate it from the area under the ownership of Elm-o-Sanat (science and technology)

University. He predicted that more ancient items would be unearthed during the second and third seasons of excavation.

The official recalled that the first excavation season had started in late July and will run through October.

A 24-member team comprising senior and junior experts as well as archeology students is working at the site.

Sadraei said the area is called by different names by locals including "The Stone Castle," "Dokhtar Castle" and "Khodaafarin Castle."

He elaborated that a pit leading to crypts containing 21 skeletons and six clay objects had been discovered during construction operations in Valiran village.

The expert added that the team had excavated a grave carved into the mountain. Archeologists also discovered valuable relics such as Arsacid coins bearing pictures of Mithridates II (123-88 BC), Sanabares (50-65) and other kings.

The expert further noted that three Rythons in the form of goats and one shoe-like Rython had been unearthed as well.

A Rhyton (ritual cup) is a ceremonial drinking cup shaped like an animal head or horn. Rhyta were favored ceremonial cups in the Ancient Near East and in Persia from the second millennium BC onwards.

Iranian artisans' unawareness of global market conditions has caused the export volume of unique artworks to plummet, head of Isfahan Handicrafts Union was quoted by ISNA as saying.

Abdollah Feizollahi said that Isfahan enamelwork (Minakari), which experienced its heydays during the Safavid dynasty (1502-1736), is nowadays approaching

its doom. He highlighted that the market is stagnant due to the high costs.

"The price of enamelware has increased in recent years due to a hike in price of copper which is the metal used in objects for enamelwork," the official explained.

The majority of people cannot afford the expensive enamelware, Feizollahi said, adding most of the items pur-

Isfahan Enamelwork Past Its Peak

chased are taken out of the country.

"Only 15 to 20 percent of enamel objects are directly exported and that is because craftsmen are barely familiar with foreign customers' preferences," he haphazardly, too."

The official noted that a

failure to attend international exhibitions and market indigenous handicrafts also contributes to the sluggish market.

"Our enamelwork artists are still making the same objects created 300 years ago. They don't know the preferences of today's market," he bemoaned.

Feizollahi elaborated that even the color of luster used for painting metal articles should be adopted based on the customers' taste. "Italians and Japanese who are the main purchasers of Iranian enamelwork prefer azure- and turquoise-colored handicrafts."

He warned that the ignorance of international market demands would inflict irreparable damage



on the craft.

The official stated that the onus to bring the art back to life falls on the government. The officials ought to support artisans by providing them with an insight into global

demands.

Feizollahi concluded that the union is working with academicians to encourage artists to craft items which have real life usages rather than simple decorative objects.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (German novelist, poet and scientist, 1749-1832):

I call architecture frozen music.



A handicrafts shop in Ilam (Photo by Hossein Khadangi)

Chinese Center To Protect Intangible Heritage

China has set up a national center to better protect the country's rich intangible cultural heritages, Xinhua wrote.

"With the establishment of the center, we hope to complete a nationwide assessment of the country's intangible cultural heritages in three years," said Wang Wenzhang, president of Academy of Arts of China, which supervises the center.

Intangible cultural heritage in China is facing a rigorous challenge in its battle against urbanization and globalization.

Wang said the national center will also focus on the academic study, investigation, promotion and conservation of China's intangible cultural heritage.

The Chinese State Council published in June its first intangible heritage list, which includes the Spring Festival, Peking Opera, acupuncture, the Legend of Madame White

Snake and Shaolin Kungfu.

The list contains 518 items in 10 categories, covering folk literature, folk music and dance, traditional opera, ballad singing, cross-talk, acrobatics, folk fine arts, traditional handicraft, traditional medicine and folk customs.

In 2001, China's Kunqu opera was listed by the UNESCO as a "masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity".

Documentation Of Tribal Medicine Underway

The Anthropology Research Center, a subsidiary of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, is planning to collect and record the traditional tribal medicine to be used as a valuable reference in compiling the herbal medicine atlas.

As reported by CHN, the center would focus on the medical knowledge of two tribal clans namely the Lar region clan in Tehran province and the Bakhtiari clan.

Homa Haji Ali-Mohammadi, in charge of the center's Environmental Anthropology Department, said the scheme is indeed the resumption of a project dubbed "Humans, Environment and Traditional Medicine" which had been suspended earlier.

She explained that the scheme would examine traditional prevention, diagnosis and treatment methods by local healers, with the intention

of identifying and officially registering native medical know-how and practices.

"This will also be of great use to the herbal atlas that is being compiled by the center," she noted.

Ali-Mohammadi recalled the project had started two months ago, adding early results were expected by the end of fall 2007, after which the gathered information would be compiled and incorporated into a report.

Luminaries

Hossein Qavami



Traditional Persian virtuoso vocalist Hossein Qavami was born in Tehran in 1909.

His father Reza Qoli was a connoisseur of traditional Persian music. Every day, he relished listening to Persian music for several hours. Qavami inherited his golden voice from his grandfather (Mirshakar Moqaddam). Qavami liked to listen to traditional Persian vocalists with great enthusiasm. The famous player of Kamancheh (traditional Iranian string instrument) Hossein Esmailzadeh, who lived in the neighborhood, encouraged the then 14-year-old Qavami to start taking lessons in singing. He predicted a bright future for Qavami.

It was how Qavami began his daily singing practices. His brother Ali who had developed a profound interest in Tar (traditional Iranian string instrument), provided Hossein with a chance to meet with great artists such as Ahmad Ebad, Hossein Yahaqqi and Ali Akbar Shahzadi. The traditional masters all encouraged Hossein to continue singing. Qavami learned from Abdollah Hejazi the methodical principles of singing and the Radifs (repertoires) for seven years.

He was invited to sing at the Iranian Radio in 1946. He performed his first song in a program by Vafadar bothers. His debut received a warm public welcome. He continued working with radio until 1950.

Since he was an army major, he was assigned to a mission and had to quit singing at radio for eight years. Qavami was again invited in 1958 by Davoud Pirnia to perform songs for the radio's famous Golha (flowers) program. Pirnia, a noted musicologist himself, was the producer. Due to certain administrative restrictions, Qavami couldn't go by his real name. Therefore, he chose Fakhteh as his artistic penname.

Fakhteh is a bird that appears mostly in early spring nights and has a very gentle and sorrowful voice, which sounds like short whistles. In some areas of Iran, this bird is believed to have been looking for its mate or a missing friend. In figurative language, a person who is filled with pain and cannot help talking about his pain is also called Fakhteh.

Two of his greatest works are "To Ey Pari Kojae?" (Where Are You the Beloved?) and "Naghme-ye Fakhteh" (The Song of Fakhteh).

Qavami passed away on March 8, 1989. His body is buried in Karaj's Imamzadeh Taher Cemetery near legendary Persian music masters Gholamhossin Banan and Mozta Hannaneh.

Center Keeps 30,000 Historic Photos

Astan-e Qods-e Razavi, a foundation in charge of religious endowments of Imam Reza (AS) Shrine, possesses a collection of 30,000 historic photos, dating as far back as 150 years, director of the Documents Department of Astan-e Qods Organization of Libraries, Museums and Documents said, IRNA reported.

Abolfazl Hassanabadi noted the oldest photo in the collection has been shot by Aqa Reza Akkasbashi, the special photographer of the Qajarid Nassereddin Shah's court.

"The photo has been shot in 1862 at Mirza Jafar Theology School of Mashhad, in Khorasan," he explained.

Also 10,000 negatives, 5,000 contact sheets and 4,500 slides, which are unique and historically precious, are being preserved in the center, he added.

Hassanabadi said the collection includes historic photos of constructions in the vicinity of Imam Reza (AS) Holy Shrine, porticos, inscriptions, facades, schools as well as valuable photos from the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The collection serves as a rich source for historical research projects, he opined.

He proposed that artists, veteran photographers and all those who possess old photos donate them to the center, to help documentation of national history and save the photos from destruction.

The center's Press and Documents Department keeps in excess of over 7.13 million documents dating to Safavid and Qajarid eras, as well as old newspapers and photos.

Astan-e Qods-e Razavi, the custodian of the Shrine of Imam Reza (AS) the eighth Imam of the infallible household of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), is a giant religious foundation also involved in social and economic activities.

50 Excavation Projects In Progress

Archeological excavations are in progress concurrently at 50 different spots around the country, as stated by chairman of Archeological Research Institute, an affiliate of Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, ILNA reported.

Hassan Fazeli Nashli said, "We have authorized some 50 teams to conduct archeological diggings. The most important studies are

ongoing in Talesh, Gilan province, Dasht-e Qarvin and Damavand in Tehran province, Kabhar Tappeh and Tappeh Kelai in Mazandaran province."

Elaborating on the responsibilities of the research center, he said, "The entity is duty-bound to conduct and provide consultation on archeological excavations, issue permits for Iranian and foreign teams, prepare archeological maps and undertake marine archeology projects."

Commenting on the status of marine archeology in Iran, he said, "The fact is that we are just at the beginning of a long path. We are now training skilled manpower for the field."

Massive archeological treasures, he said, are lying deep down in the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman waters. "They have remained largely undiscovered and we are hoping to uncover them in the future."

One criterion for the

selection of non-Iranian teams, he said, is the superiority of their proposals. "Most of these foreign teams have had the experience of working in Iran, which means we attach importance to their background as well."

According to Fazeli Nashli, five foreign teams comprising experts from the US, Russia, Italy, Britain, France, Germany and Japan are involved in archeological studies in Iran.