

Attractive Customs



Gorgan Plain is situated along the Caspian Sea coastline, but rises above the sea-level as we go toward the east side of the plain. To its north is a vast low region that stretches as far as Turkmenistan and to its south lie the eastern parts of Alborz mountains, which has peaks exceeding 3,000 meters.

According to Iranchamber website, the mountainous region situated to the east of Gorgan Plain includes villages and districts of Kalaleh, Goli Dagh, Ghara Bolkhan, Torveh Tappeh and Hesarche. The region where Iranian Turkmans live, called Turkman Sahra, is located to the south of Atrak River.

>Tribal Roots

Turkmans arrived from Central Asia and live under various social and natural conditions.

According to ancient narratives, the head of Turkmans was a person called Aghooz Khan, who is regarded in Turkman myths as Adam. Another point worthy of mention in these myths is the reference made to Noah and his three sons. In the Turkmans' family tree, we come across names like Tatar, Turk, etc. who were descendants of a tribal leader named Alinje Khan.

Marriage in the tribal system plays an important role due to the need for manpower. Women play a big role, as they make felt, spin wool, weave carpets and cloths, milk cows and sheep, prepare dairy products for the family, build cottages and help men in cultivation, maintenance and harvesting of agricultural products. And, most important of all, they give birth to children and help their husbands in other activities too.

For the same reason, elaborate and glorious ceremonies and rites are observed in the case of courting and marriage.



>Marriage Ceremonies

Sport contests, including horse racing and wrestling, are performed by men while adolescents dance and some groups sing songs.

As the wedding ceremony is important among Turkmans, it would be appropriate to describe its stages.

The ceremony is usually held in an open space and string instruments are played. Men and women celebrate separately. As guests come from far-off places, celebrations continue for two or three days, so that everybody gets an opportunity to participate.

The men's assembly begins with the playing of a double-stringed instrument and flute, and a kind of soup called shurva is consumed.

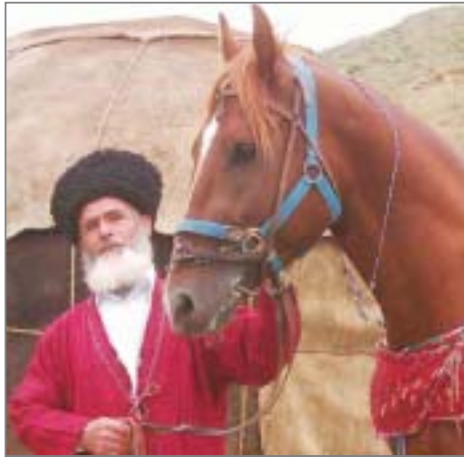
The bride is taken to the bridegroom's house in kajaveh (kind of pannier used in pairs on camels or mules). When taking the kajaveh, 30 horsemen ride alongside each of whom with a piece of cloth 1.5 meters long strung from his horse to indicate his tribe.

Before the bride mounts the kajaveh, her mother sprinkles white flour



as a sign of good luck. Then the kajaveh moves along. At this time, agile horsemen move toward the bridegroom's house to announce the news about the bride's departure. Whoever gets first to the bridegroom's house receives a prize, which is a kind of shawl hung round the neck of the horse. This kind of race is now called desert race.

When the bride moves toward the bridegroom's house, handkerchiefs are waved in the sky and songs are sung. The guests are then entertained.



>Traditional Sports

The main sport in Turkmans' life is horse racing. Turkman horse riders start their career from the age of 5, that is from the time they can sit on a horse.

In addition to horse racing, wrestling is an important traditional sport of Turkmans. They practice this sport from a very young age and win awards for their villages and towns.

Turkman wrestling contest is an arena for showing one's strength against known or unknown rivals. Weights of participants or time of contests are not taken into account. The two contestants continue their fights indefinitely until the final results are announced. The space of this contest is not limited and the wrestler is allowed to tackle his rival over a long area.

The most important point in this wrestling is that if the hand or knee or any part of the wrestler's body, except his palm, touches the ground, the wrestler is declared the loser, and the referee will raise the other's hand and will declare him the winner. A prize is usually awarded to the winner. In traditional Turkman wrestling, strong wrists and legs contribute to victory. Wrestling rarely ends in a draw.

If the shoulders or sides of the two champions touch the ground at the same time, the match will end in 'chal' or draw and the hands of the two will be raised as winners. Any prize envisaged for this purpose will be divided equally between the two.

Wrestling is held during religious festivities, weddings, circumcisions and other happy occasions. As a sign of vow or dedication, the recipient ties the handkerchief and touches it on his forehead.

In Turkman Sahra, all weddings and celebrations end in horse racing and wrestling. These events are, in fact, the main elements of celebrations.

Persian Gulf Confab in UK

Head of the Research Center of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Taha Hashemi said a Persian Gulf archeology conference will be held at the University of Durham in the United Kingdom on June 30.

Iranian and foreign archeologists from the UK and Italy will attend the event.

The two-day conference is aimed at presenting the latest archeological achievements that prove Iran's sovereignty over the Persian Gulf since thousands of years.

Hashemi also said that a report on 100 years of archeology in Iran will soon be published in the form of a book, noting that future excavations by ICHHTO will focus on gaps in Iranian history.

"Services of all foreign and Iranian archeologists familiar with the subject will be utilized. Iranian and foreign archeologists have conducted many excavations related to Iranian history, but they are in bits and pieces. After completing all existing reports, Iranian history will be rewritten," he said.

In Case You Missed

Iran to Unveil

Ancient Bronze Coffin

A 7th century BC bronze coffin will be unveiled during the Cultural Heritage Week to be held in Iran this month.

Iran's cultural officials plan to unveil the bronze coffin belonging to the Elamite era in a glass chamber, reported Pressstv.

The Arjan historical site, located in Iran's south-



western province of Khuzestan, was a flourishing city during ancient times and remained a vibrant urban center until the beginning of the Islamic period.

The coffin belongs to Kitiin Hutran, an Elamite King, who ruled during the late second millennium BC in the region.

The coffin was accidentally unearthed during digging operations for building the Maroun Dam in the historic area of Arjan.

Iran's Cultural Heritage Week will be held during May 17-23.

Bam Tower, Caravanseray

To Be Restored

An archeological and restoration team from Italy will join Iranian archeologists to restore a tower and caravanserai of Bam Citadel.

"In a letter to the officials of Bam Restoration Project, Italy offered to undertake restoration of a tower and caravanserai in Bam Citadel," Eskandar Mokhtari, manager of the Bam Restoration Project, said.

"The restoration work on the caravanserai is expected to



take at least a year and the cost is estimated to be around \$1 million," Mokhtari added.

According to Pressstv, Bam Citadel is the largest adobe structure in the world, which is located in Bam, a city in Iran's southeastern province of Kerman.

It is listed by UNESCO as part of the World Heritage Site under the title: "Bam and its Cultural Landscape".

An earthquake devastated the citadel on December 26, 2003, which archeologists hope to restore.

Committee to Reclaim

Historical Works

An Iranian official said a committee has been established to reclaim historical works taken overseas illegally.

Jalil Golshan, director of the Office for Historical Movable Assets of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHHTO), also told IRNA that after experts of the committee study related books, catalogues and brochures, they will specify which work has been taken out of Iran legally and which has been smuggled.

"The next step would be to launch legal or diplomatic moves for reclaiming the works, in line with our laws and those of the target countries," he added.

Golshan noted that the committee is currently studying historical books of ICHHTO and the National Museum of Iran's Library.

"We have also corresponded with the Foreign Ministry to identify all documents on Iranian historical items through our diplomatic missions," he said.