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Tourism

Journey to the past: a glimpse of Tehran-Rome projects in archaeology

November 9, 2020 - 21:24

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IRNA عکس از گزارش سلامت هفتگی بزرگ Date & Time: 1392/08/09 - 16:44

Tehran and Rome have enhanced cooperation over the past couple of decades, with the arenas of archaeology and cultural heritage at the topmost level.

In fact, archaeology has been proved to be one of the most traditional areas of cooperation between the two nations that celebrated 60 years of joint missions last November.

In an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times in August, Italian ambassador to Tehran Giuseppe Perrone said: "Archaeology is certainly an area for us that is extremely important because it tells the



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world how our countries are heirs to ancient civilizations and this extremely important because it is part of identity, it's part of who we are, and it helps us to better connect with one another."

"And I think because our cultural ties are so deep and so complete in every area, that we do have a responsibility to showcase this richness and to tell people the story of this important connection that has always existed between Italy and Iran in different areas so we look forward to our future projects which are going to be quite amazing," he stated.

It's now 61 years that tens of Italian archaeologists have worked with their Iranian fellows to ace important discoveries. Their cooperation can be classified into four major lines given below:

Joint mission in Fars province

The oldest Italian archaeological collaboration now active in Iran (started in 2005) is the Iranian-Italian Joint Archaeological Mission in the southern province of Fars, which involves the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (ISMEO), University of Bologna, Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism (RICHT), Iranian Center of Research for Archaeology (ICAR), Shiraz University, Fars Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Department and the Persepolis World Heritage Site.

This mission, co-directed by professor Alireza Askari Chaverdi from Shiraz University and professor Pierfrancesco Callieri from University of Bologna and ISMEO, has been active in the Persepolis region since 2008 and has produced one of the most sensational archaeological discoveries of the last fifty years, the Early Achaemenid gate of Tol-e Ajori, a larger replica of the Ishtar Gate of Babylon, characterized by the same plan and glazed brick decoration. The last excavation campaign, aimed at preparing the site for the conservation interventions necessary for the creation of a site museum, is currently underway, with the Italian team participating in remote due to Covid-19 restrictions.

The royal city of Persepolis, also known as Takht-e Jamshid, which was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire, ranks among the archaeological sites which have no equivalent, considering its unique architecture, urban planning, construction technology, and art.

Archaeological project in Shahr-e-Soukhteh

The international multidisciplinary archaeological project in the ancient Shahr-e-Soukhteh (Burnt City), southeastern Sistan-Baluchestan province directed by Enrico Ascalone, was founded following the Agreement signed in December 2016 between the University of Salento and the RICHT of Tehran.

The project, assisted and hosted by the Iranian archaeological mission that has been working in the field since 1997, pursues a multidisciplinary approach borrowed from the pioneering studies carried out on the site between 1967 and 1978. Paleo-botanical, anthropological, archeozoological, and topographical studies are combined with excavation activities in the residential areas of the center. The project has made it possible to acquire new information on the occupational life of the site between the first and second half of the third millennium BC.

As in previous years, the research in 2020, has been sponsored by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the University of Salento, and due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, will be continued by a long-distance activity in order not to lose the enormous amount of work still to be done on the site. Although the Italian team is unable to travel, field research will be ensured through remote assistance via daily webinar contacts between the two research teams.

Founded around 3200 BC, "Shahr-e Soukhteh" was populated during four main periods up to 1800 BC. Previous rounds of excavations showed that its residents had great skills in weaving, creating fine arts such as decorative objects, stone carving, and pottery painting.

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Sapienza University in Kermanshah project

An archeological mission established by the Department of Ancient Sciences of the Sapienza University in collaboration with local institutions which began in 2019, has focused its interest on the cultural archeological, historical, and cultural heritage of Kermanshah region, western Iran, between late antiquity and early Islamic period.

As the region is of great historical importance as it is a gateway to the Iranian plateau as well as a crossroad of important roads leading to the Mesopotamian plain, it has extraordinary archaeological richness and an equally wide linguistic and cultural variety. The variety and abundance of its historical and cultural heritage now require full enhancement and redevelopment for tourism purposes.

The first activities started, concerned with the documentation of the impressive architectural evidence of the monumental site of Kangavar, carried out with innovative methodologies and instruments in November 2019 to better understand the structure of the site and the land. The study of the territory is planned to be extended in the near future to the other key historical sites in the region, such as Qaleh Yazdgerd and the contiguous valleys of Piran and Ban Zardeh. At the same time topographical surveys on still poorly documented sites in the region, such as the Sassanid and proto-Islamic evidence of Qaleh Maryam, Zij Manijeh, Sorkkeh Dizeh, Zij Anzal, Firuzabad, will offer prospectively essential data aimed at archaeological investigation and enhancement of the territory through the identification and organization of new itineraries of historical-cultural interest, first among which is the section between Qasr-e Shirin and Kangavar.

Expedition in Khuzestan

The Iranian-Italian Joint Expedition in Khuzestan, held by the RICHT-ICAR, the Centro Scavi Torino (CRASST), and the University of Torino operates since 2008 in the region of ancient Elymais, southwestern Iran, under the co-direction of Vito Messina and Jafar Mehr Kian.

Elymais was an ancient Parthian vassal state located east of the lower Tigris River and usually considered part of the larger district of Susiana. It incorporated much of the area of the biblical region of Elam, approximately equivalent to the modern region of Khuzestan.

Research is conducted on Hellenistic and Parthian archaeological remains with the purpose of investigating processes of interaction between the Iranian, Mesopotamian, and Greek cultures. Surveys, laser scanner acquisitions (conducted for the first time in Iran), and excavations have been so far conducted at Hung-e Azhdar in the plain of Izeh, Kal-e Chendar in the valley of Shami, and Qaleh Bardi, west of the Karun River. The sanctuary at Kal-e Chendar, which is under excavation, is particularly interesting for it testifies for the first time to the existence of religious and funerary functions in the same place.

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