

National Museum
of Iran

Iran Bastan Museum



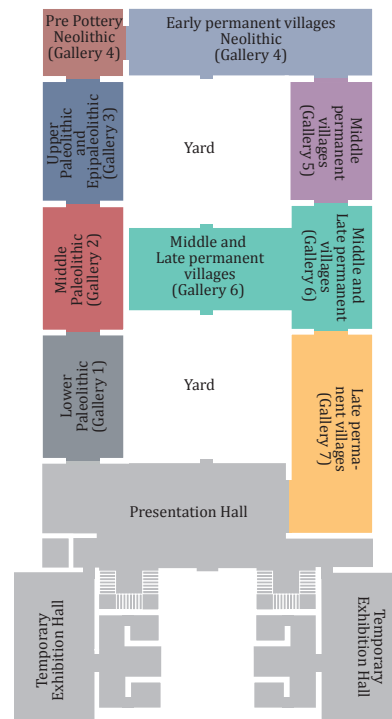
Irān Bāstān Museum

The Irān Bāstān Museum is the first building specifically designed and built in Iran as a museum. It was designed by the French architect André Godard and built by two Iranian masons, Abbās-Ali Me'mār and Ostād Morād Tabrizi between 1933 and 1936. Its traditional facade was inspired by the famous arch of Tāq-e Kasrā in Ctesiphon, one of the famous examples of the architecture of the Sasanian period. The buildings brickwork exhibits the Persian tradition of brick construction.

The permanent exhibition covers a surface area of some 4,800 square meters over two floors and a basement, and houses over 2,000 selected artifacts in chronological order, from the Lower Paleolithic period (ca. 1,000,000 years ago) to the end of the Sasanid period (651 CE). The first floor galleries contain prehistoric objects including Paleolithic, Epipaleolithic, Neolithic and Chalcolithic artifacts. The ground floor galleries contain historic objects including Bronze Age, Iron Age, Elamite, Achaemenid, Selucid, Parthian, and Sasanian artifacts.



A 3D model of National Museum of Iran



1st floor, Iran Bastan Museum



Prehistoric Galleries

The Paleolithic Period Mobile Hunter-Gatherers

(ca. 3.3 million to ca. 12 thousand years ago)

In the long span of the Paleolithic period, humans lived in small bands with a nomadic lifestyle, making a living mainly from hunting wild animals and gathering wild plants. This period is characterized by the use of chipped stone tools and later antler and bone tools and the appearance of Paleolithic period is sub-divided into: Lower Paleolithic (ca. 3.300.000-250.000 years ago), Middle Paleolithic (ca. 250.000 - 40.000 years ago), and Upper Paleolithic (ca. 40.000 - 20.000 years ago), followed by Epipaleolithic (ca. 20.000 - 12.000 years ago).

The most ancient artifacts in the museum (Gallery 1) are stone tools dating to the Lower Paleolithic period. These tools belong to times when early humans lived by means of hunting, scavenging, gathering and foraging, and used stone tools for cutting animal flesh, making wooden tools, and other implements and objects. Remains of this period – mostly stone tools – have been discovered at archaeological sites such as Kashafrud in Khorāsān, Lādz in Sistān and Baluchistān, Shiwatoo in Kurdistān, Ganj Par in Gilān, all open-air sites, and Darband Cave, also in Gilān.

In the Middle Paleolithic period bands of humans subsisted through actively hunting and gathering plant foods. During this period Neanderthals and early anatomically modern humans were roaming western Asia. Representative stone tools of this period made from flint and other rock types, and animal bones, some with cut marks, are on display in the Museum. These remains come from caves or open-air sites in the Zagros Mountains and the Iranian Plateau. Important stone tools of this period include points and side-scrapers used for butchering hunted game and processing animal hides as well as other tasks. Examples of stone tools of this period from caves and rockshelters and open-air sites in the Zagros region (Bisotun, Lurestān, Arsanjān, Qaleh



Core - chopper
Kashafrud
Khorasan Razavi
Lower Paleolithic



Biface (triangular)
Amar Merdeg,
Mehran plain, Ilam
Lower Paleolithic

Between 1-2 million BP

Lower Paleolithic

- First dispersal of *Homo erectus* from Africa to Asia and Europe
- Hunting and food gathering
- Appearance of stone tool industries of Oldowan and Acheulian
- Controlled use of fire for heating and cooking

250,000 years BP

Middle Paleolithic

- Neanderthals and early modern humans
- Appearance of stone tool industry of Mousterian and use of Levallois method
- Increasing use of caves for shelter

40,000 years BP

Upper Paleolithic

- Migration of anatomically modern human societies to Iranian Plateau
- Appearance of stone blade/bladelet industry of Baradostian
- Making pendants and personal ornaments, bone tools and use of ochre

20,000 years BP

Epipaleolithic

- Appearance of bow and arrow and composite tools
- Appearance of stone bladelet industry of Zarzian
- Fishing, growing use of aquatic and avian resources and collecting wild cereals

Bozi) and central Iran (Mirak, Niāsar, Parvadeh, Zaviyeh) are on display in the museum (Gallery 2). One of the oldest human fossil remains from Iran, discovered in a small cave called Wezmeh near Kermanshah in the west-central Zagros, are on display. This is a human premolar tooth representing a late juvenile individual, who may have been the prey of carnivores such as hyenas and wolves whose remains are abundant in the Wezmeh Cave. A human radius (forearm) fragment from a Neanderthal has been discovered in Bisotun cave is located in the same region of the west-central Zagros.

The Upper Paleolithic period, which began around 40,000 years ago and came to a close about 20,000 years ago, coincides with the arrival of anatomically modern humans (also known as Homo sapiens sapiens) in Iran. In this period, making stone tools such as blades and bladelets expanded. personal ornaments like pendants made from shell, animal teeth, and a reddish-black iron mineral (hematite) appeared in this period, of which some examples from Yāfteh Cave are on display. Red ochre was also used quite abundantly. Among important sites dating to this period are Yāfteh and Kaldar caves in Lurestān, Warwāsi, Malāverd and Ghār-e Khar Cave in Kermānshāh, Sefid-Āb in Kāshān, and Eshkaft-e Gāvi and



Arjaneh Points
Yafteh Cave
Lorestan
Upper Paleolithic

Boof Caves in Fārs. Artifacts from some of these sites are on display in the Museum.

The next period - called the Epipaleolithic (meaning terminal Paleolithic) - is characterized by composite tools, tools for processing plant material, and installations for storing food stuff. The Epipaleolithic period begins around 20,000 years ago and goes on until to the end of the Ice Age, about 12,000 years ago. Examples of tools and ornaments of this period from Ali Tappeh and Komishān caves in Māzandarān, Pā Sangar Rockshelter in Lurestān and a number of other sites are on display in the Museum hall (Gallery 3).



Levallois Core
Harsin, Kermanshah
Middle Paleolithic

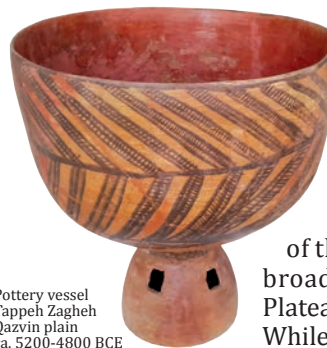


Shell pendant
Ali Tappeh Cave
Mazandaran
Epipaleolithic

The Neolithic and Chalcolithic Periods

The Age of Permanent Villages and Early Towns (ca. 10,000 to ca. 5,000 years ago)

From the Late Epipaleolithic period mobile bands of hunter-gatherers gradually settled down in very small



Pottery vessel
Tappeh Zagheh
Qazvin plain
ca. 5200-4800 BCE



Clay Boar Figurine
Tappeh Sarab
Kermanshah
ca. 7000-6100 BCE

villages comprised of a handful of related families. The earliest of such villages were established in the piedmont regions of the Zagros Mountains, where wild species of wheat, barley, sheep, goat and pig were native. As these early villages managed to domesticate such species and attained control over their food supplies, populations grew and new villages were established in areas outside of the nuclear zones in the alluvial plains and lower broad valleys, such as Khuzestān, Fārs and the Central Plateau.

While the use of stone tools and stone vessels were known prior to the establishment of the early villages,

the most important invention of the early Neolithic period was the use of baked or fired pottery vessels. This important craft, that seems to have been developed first in western and southwestern Iran, underwent a rapid change from crude, undecorated simple containers, to well-baked and sophisticated vessels of many different shapes and decorated with exquisite painted designs.

Similarly, the simple adobe houses of the of the early villages, made of packed mud (known as pisé) and thatched roofs, rapidly developed into multi-chambered houses made of mud bricks, and some were even decorated



House model
Sang-e Chakhmaq
Shahrud, Semnan
ca. 5700 BCE



with multi-colored paintings. The complexity of social relations and crystallization of religious ideas led in some larger villages to the erection of large and monumental buildings (temples) as the sites of communal worship. A huge collection of variously shaped decorated and plain clay figurines from almost every ancient village is another manifestaion of such religious beliefs, the nature and structure of which are not known to us. Examples of these figurines discovered at Sarāb and Sang-e Chakhmāq, are on display in the Museum. Stone tools hafted with bone or wooden handles



Conical pottery bowl
Tall-e Bakun A
ca. 4500-4100 BCE



Pottery vessel
Sialk, Kashan, Isfahan
ca. 3750-3350 BCE



Painted pottery beaker
Susa, Khuzestan
ca. 4300-4000 BCE

were used in this period to harvest cereals, of which one from Sang-e Chakhmāq is on display.

This early Neolithic development was truly revolutionary in the long history of the human species. The “Neolithic Revolution” freed humans from the constant search for food and shelter. Control over food and a sedentary life quickly resulted in unprecedented growth in population. As the population grew and social interaction and conflict arose, the fabric of the society became more complex and new social norms and regulations developed to solve social problems. This inevitably led to the emergence of an elite class to lead the community; economic differentiation, too, developed. This entire web of social development eventually led to another fundamental social change: the “urban revolution” and emergence of state societies. Just prior to the age of the “urban revolution” around 4000 BCE, control of the economy by both individuals and social organizations, such as the temple or the community’s chief house, was expressed by stamp seals that were developed around 5000 BCE. This early device for ownership and control of the flow of goods became another layer of social and economic complexity that finally around 3500 BCE resulted in the emergence of political organizations and states. Examples of such early seals, from sites like Bākun, Gīyān and Seh Gābi, are on display.

The Formation of Early States and Urban Societies (ca. 3300 to ca. 559 BCE)

The people belonging to Paleolithic bands and the Neolithic-Chalcolithic societies were predominantly equal but, as the Chalcolithic period drew to a close, some societies became ranked and eventually stratified, meaning that some people belonged to lower status ranks with lesser access to goods, while some belonged to higher ranks with more access to resources. This development and the division of people into different classes paved the way for a major landmark in human history: the rise of states and the formation of civilizations.



Chlorite stone vessel
Jiroft, Kerman
3rd mill. BCE



Clay bust
Shahdad, Kerman
3rd mill. BCE



Painted pottery vessel
Shahr-e Sokhteh, Sistan
3rd mill. BCE



850 BCE Iron Age III 559 BCE Achaemenid 330 BCE Seleucids 250 BCE Parthians 224 CE Sasanids 651 CE

- Mannea Kingdom
- Elipi Kingdom
- Median Kingdom
- New Elamite Kingdom I and II
- Making glazed pottery vessels (using metal oxides)

- Establishing the first empire
- Using ancient Persian, Elamite and Aramaic in scripts
- Conquer of Babylon, issuing charter of Cyrus
- Creation of Chaparkhaneh, post and king road
- Rediging Suez canal 516 BC
- Coinage by the order of Darius

- Alexander’s death 323 BC
- Forming of Seleucid dynasty
- Expansion of Hellenistic art in Iran

- Beginning of Parthian dynasty
- Use of Parthian Pahlavi language and script
- Feudalism system
- Applying of stucco in architectural internal decoration

- Recognition of Zoroastrian religion
- Creation of fortification in borders
- Design and construction of water supply systems and sealants
- Management of Water resources by creating channels, dam
- Making dams and residual places according to the predefind plans
- Effort to develop Iran’s borders according to the Achaemenid era

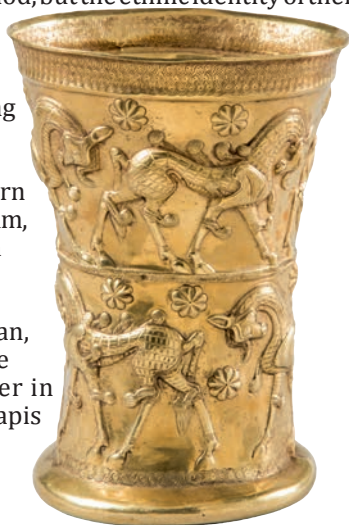
there are assemblages from regions such as Jiroft and Shahdād, as well as Lurestan Bronzes, that occupy a prominent place in this period, but the ethnic identity of their makers still remains an enigma.

During the Middle Bronze Age, the Iranian Plateau experienced a short florescence of urbanism. Urban centers on the plateau, including Shahr-i Sokhteh, Hissār, Yahyā, Shahdād, and Jiroft, were linked through an exchange network that connected the plateau with Central Asia the southern coast of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman, Elam, and Mesopotamia. Highly desirable commodities in this network included copper from central and southeastern Iran and Oman, lapis lazuli from Badakhshān in Afghanistan and Quetta in Pakistan, and stone from southwestern Iran and Oman. These materials reached their final destinations either in the form of raw material or as finished goods. Lapis lazuli workshops have been discovered at Shahr-i Sokhteh and Hissār, while Yahyā and Jiroft seem to have been centers for carving various objects from steatite and chlorite. A number of these carved products are on display in the ground floor of the Museum. A major technological breakthrough in the Bronze Age was the introduction of bronze alloy by mixing copper and tin. This provided a suitable medium for a whole new range of artifacts, especially arms of different kind (for clubbing and stabbing and types of projectiles), harnesses for beasts of burden, vessels of various types, and a whole array of personal ornaments. Examples on display in the Museum hall speak of a high level of craftsmanship.

As the indigenous cultures of Iran experienced a period of decline in the mid-second millennium BCE, waves of newly arrived Iranian-speaking peoples migrating into Iran from Central Asia began to inject a new spirit into Iranian life. The majority of these people took the southern route (south of the Alburz range) on to the central plateau and from there to the south (to later become the Persians),

or to the west (to later become the Medes), while some took the northern route (north of the Alburz range) into the Caspian basin where their splendid remains have been discovered in numerous graveyards such as Mārlik. The new culture with its distinctive grey pottery that appeared in the northeastern plateau and replaced existing pottery at sites in the Gorgān Plain is commonly believed to represent the gradual migration of these Iranian-speaking peoples on to the Iranian Plateau. While in southwestern Iran the Elamites were engaged in warfare with the Assyrians, in northern regions (i.e., the Central and Northern Zagros mountains and the center of the plateau) a number of newly established polities stepped out into

history, consolidated their roots, watched the conflict between the Elamites and the Mesopotamians, gained experience and in due course unleashed their force upon the Assyrians (the most powerful state in Mesopotamia at that time).



Golden beaker
Marlik, Gilan
Iron Age, 1st mill. BCE



Glazed Brick
Qalaichi, Boukan
Mannaean
7th century BCE

The Achaemenids (559 to 330 BCE)

Of the Iranian-speaking peoples who migrated into Iran, one in particular—the Persians—chose to head south, where they apparently settled in Fārs (ancient Anshān), mingled with the native Elamite population, and formed a polity comprising Persian and Elamite elements that eventually led to the rise of the largest empire the world had seen up to that point.

Following the wars of conquest by Cyrus the Great and his son and successor Cambyses, Darius the Great embarked on consolidating and structuring the Empire. It was he who introduced standardized coinage, called darics, that along with an extensive network of roads facilitated contact and interaction between people from distant corners of the Empire, both culturally and commercially. Egyptian objects discovered at Susā and Persepolis are fine examples of this large-scale cultural contact and interaction among the subjects of the Achaemenid Empire. Arts also flourished in the Achaemenid period: metal-working, stone-masonry, stone-carving, and glazed brick-working reached new heights, as shown by several fine examples on display in the Museum hall. Another innovation that can be seen in the Museum on several stone inscriptions is the Old Persian script introduced during the time of Darius the Great. Despite its power and glory and policy of tolerance, the Achaemenid Empire failed to withstand the better-equipped, battle-hardened, and tactically more competent Macedonian and Greek army led by Alexander the Great and fell in 330 BCE.



statue of a large mastiff
seated on a base
Polished black limestone
Persepolis, Fars
Achaemenid



Stone statue of Darius the Great
Susā, Khuzestan
Achaemenid

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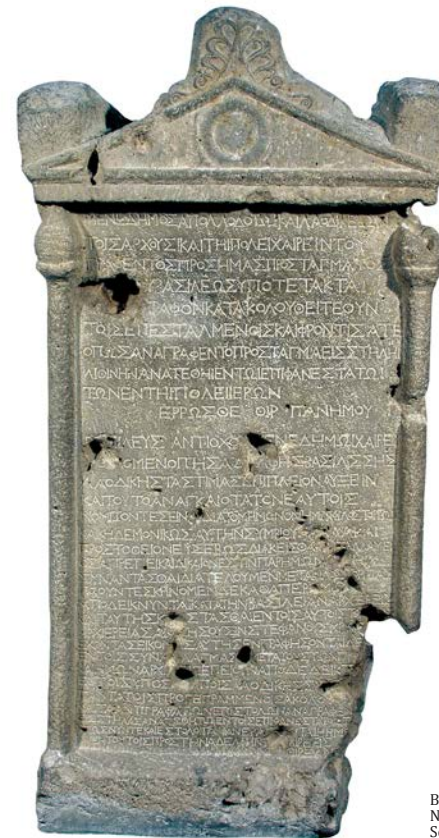
Stone statue of Darius the Great
Susa, Khuzestan
Achaemenid

The Seleucids (313 to 146 BCE)

One of Alexander's generals who succeeded him, Seleucus Nicator, chose Iran as his domain and established the Seleucid Empire. Seleucus had married a Persian princess and therefore attained his legitimacy before Iranians through his wife, but the discovery of a few sanctuaries for Greek gods and goddesses and the many Greek inscriptions and statuettes in Iran (some of which are on display in the Museum) is a testimony to the spread of Greek culture in Iran. This phenomenon influenced both the Seleucids and their eventual successors, the Arsacids, who rose up in defiance of the Seleucids in northeast Iran, and after a century of fighting drove them from Iranian soil.



Bronze head of seleucid ruler
Shami, Izeh, Khuzestan
Seleucid



Memorial stele with Greek
Inscription
Nahavand, Hamedan
Seleucid, 193 BCE



Bronze Figurine of Zeus
Nahavand, Hamedan
Seleucid

The Parthians (250 BCE to 224 CE)

Just as the Achaemenids—named after Achaemenes—were the ruling clan of the Persians, the Arsacids—named after Arsaces, the legendary founder of the dynasty—were the ruling clan of the Parthians, another Iranian tribe inhabiting the northeastern parts of Iran. As the Seleucid grip on this distant part of their empire began to loosen, the Arsacids and Parthians sought to grasp the opportunity to pursue their independence. The Parthians were master riders and marksmen who are still remembered today in expressions such as “the Parthian Shot.” They were divided, however, into several clans that made their empire far less homogenous and centralized than those of their predecessors (Achaemenids) or successors (Sasanids). This system made the Parthians vulnerable to their new western neighbor, the mighty Roman Empire, which was gradually encroaching upon Western Asia, traditionally considered to be an Iranian territory. Despite several advances into the Parthian Empire and the capture and looting of Ctesiphon—the Parthian capital, not far from modern Baghdad—three times, Parthians managed to stand firm before the Roman juggernaut and even defeat and repulse them on a number of occasions. The damage, however, was done and the Arsacids lost their divine mandate before Iranians due to their successive defeats and they were soon overthrown and replaced by the Sasanids.

The Parthian period lacks a coherent corpus of arts and its art seems rather provincial compared to that of the Achaemenids or the Sasanids. Yet a number of splendid, but isolated finds underline the aesthetic and technological accomplishments of Parthian art. Perhaps first and foremost among these is the life-size bronze statue of a presumably Parthian nobleman discovered in the early 20th century in Shami in southwestern Iran and now on display in the Museum hall. The Parthians were also master glass-makers, and examples of this art can be found in the museum hall.



Bronze statue of a Parthian nobleman
Shami, Izeh, Khuzestan

Salt man
Natural mummy of a man including head, and parts of trunk, a lower leg inside a leather boot, two iron knives, a wool half trouser, a silver needle, a sling, parts of a leather rope, a grindstone, a walnut, some pottery shards, and patterned textile fragments
Zanjan
Parthian, ca. 200 CE



The Sasanids (224 to 651 CE)

The Sasanids were from Persia - the homeland of the Achaemenids - and therefore had claim to the Achaemenid Persian legacy. Once the Arsacids had lost their divine mandate due to multiple defeats at the hands of the Romans, the Sasanids, under the ambitions of Ardashir I, a local dynast from the city of Istakhr, not far from Persepolis, rose in rebellion and defeated Artabanus V, the last Arsacid king-of-kings. They established a new dynasty, called the Sasanids, named after Sasan, the grandfather of Ardeshir I, evidently the chief priest of the temple of the goddess Anāhitā in Istakhr.

Unlike the Arsacids, the Sasanids strived to create a centralized and homogenous empire that allowed them to embark on a far more aggressive approach towards the Romans, pushing them back across the Euphrates, sometimes even farther west. The new Sasanid approach also translated into major construction works within Iran, including several cities that have been excavated (i.e., Veh Ardešir and Bišāpur) and many others (e.g., Jundišapur, Ivan-e Karkheh, Dārābgerd, etc.) that await the archaeologist's trowel. Similarly, in the arts the Sasanian period witnessed a major renaissance, from many rock-reliefs and decorative stuccoes to personal ornaments, silver or gilded vessels, textiles, stamp seals with exquisite designs, and last but not least, beautifully executed and realistic images on coins. Several examples of different categories of Sasanian artifacts are on display in the Museum hall.

The Sasanids succeeded in creating another golden age in Iran but, towards the end of the dynasty, incessant war with the Romans, as well as internal feuds over the imperial throne, and economic problems due to salinization of agricultural land in Khuzestān and Mesopotamia (the bread-baskets of the Empire) exhausted the Sasanid Empire and made it an easy prey for mounted tribesmen emerging from Arabia and bringing with them the message of Islam. The murder of Yazdgird III and the escape of what was left of the Sasanid royal family to China in the mid-seventh century CE marks the fall of the Sasanid dynasty and the end of ancient Iran, only to be followed by yet another glorious period under Islam.



Gilded silver plate
Sari, Mazandaran
Sasanian



The bust of a male personage
Hajjabad, Fars
Sasanian



Silver coin, Shapur II
Susa, Khuzestan
Sasanian
ca. 309-379 CE





Bronze disc-headed Pin
Lurestan
1200 BCE



Bronze axe head
Zaluab cemetery, Kermanshah
ca. 1200-1000 BCE

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Location map and access routes to the National Museum of Iran

Opening hours
Spring and Summer:
Daily 09-19
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Daily 09-17

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