

The earliest and more extensively studied (albeit still little-known) civilization that emerged in Iran was Elam. Elam—perhaps the longest-lasting civilization in the Near East (from 3300 to 550 BCE)—encompassed a fairly sizable area from the Susiana Plain in the west to Fars in the east, in which the Elamites established Iran's first cities (i.e., Susa and Anshan). Elamitologists¹ divide the long span of Elamite history into eight periods: Proto-Elamite period (ca.3300 to 2700 BCE), First Intermediate Period (ca. 2700 to 2500 BCE), Old Elamite period (ca. 2500 to 1700 BCE), Second Intermediate Period (ca. 1700 to 1500 BCE), Middle Elamite Period (ca. 1500 to 1000 BCE), Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1000 to 850 BCE), Neo-Elamite Period (ca. 850 to 646 BCE), and Terminal Elamite Period (646 to 550 BCE). All of these periods are represented in the Museum with splendid artifacts, but of particular importance is the late Old Elamite period and, especially, the Middle Elamite period, when Elamite civilization reached remarkable heights in political power and cultural glory, perhaps best demonstrated by the Ziggurat complex at Choghā Zanbil. Some of its finds from there (e.g., the inscribed bull, tubular glass, glazed knobs, and terracotta bovine figures) decorate the Museum hall. The Elamites had their own distinct language that was initially written in a pictorial script, but which was soon replaced by an adaptation of the Mesopotamian cuneiform script. Afterwards, the lowland Elamites, at least, used Elamite, as well as Sumerian and Akkadian for administrative and economic purposes, while Elamite was primarily used in royal inscriptions. Examples of all of these different scripts and languages, dating to different periods, are on display in the Museum hall. As Elam flourished, in other corners of Iran we see other societies emerging and developing to become independent polities. However, our knowledge of these civilizations ranges from scanty (Simāški, Marhaši, ...) to meager (Gutiāns, Lullubians, ...). In the meantime,

Blue glazed terracotta bull with Elamite inscription Choghā Zanbil, Khuzestan Middle Elamite Period ca. 1250 BCE Inv. No. 3213



Glazed Brick Qalaichi, Boukan Western Azarbaijan Mannaean Ca. 800-700 BCE Inv. No. 13653

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 fluorescence 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 Märlik. 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 Märlik, Gilan Iron Age II, ca. 1150-850 BCE Inv. No. 7698



Glazed Brick Qalaichi, Boukan Western Azarbaijan Mannaean Ca. 800-700 BCE Inv. No. 13653

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 period ca. 550-486 BCE Inv. No. 340



Stone statue of Darius the Great Susa, Khuzestan Achaemenid period 550-486 BCE Inv. No. 4112

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.



Memorial stele with Greek Inscription Nahavand, Hamedan Seleucid period, ca. 313-146 BCE Inv. No. 3992



Bronze figurine of Zeus Nahavand, Hamedan Seleucid period ca. 313-146 BCE Inv. No. 444



Bronze statue of a Parthian nobleman Shami, Izeh, Khuzestan ca. 50 BCE-50 AD Inv. No. 2401



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 Late Parthian period/Early Sasanian period, ca. 220-390 BCE Inv. No. 2959



Bronze head of seleucid ruler Kal-e Chendar, Shami, Izeh, Khuzestan Seleucid period ca. 223-187 BCE Inv. No. 477

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 north-eastern 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.



The Sasanids (224 to 651 CE)

The Sasanids were from Persia - the homeland of the Achaemenids - and therefore had claim the to 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 Artashir 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 Ardashir 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 Yazdgerd 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.



The bust of a male personage Hajjabad, Fars Sasanian period ca. 309-379 CE Inv. No. 4725



Silver coin, Shapur II Susa, Khuzestan Sasanian period ca. 309-379 CE Inv. 243



Gilded silver plate Sari, Mazandaran Sasanian period Inv. 1275

Iran Bastan Museum National Museum of Iran



Silver coin, Shapur II Susa, Khuzestan Sasanian period ca. 309-379 CE Inv. 243



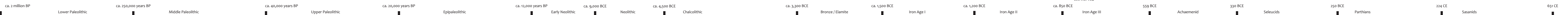
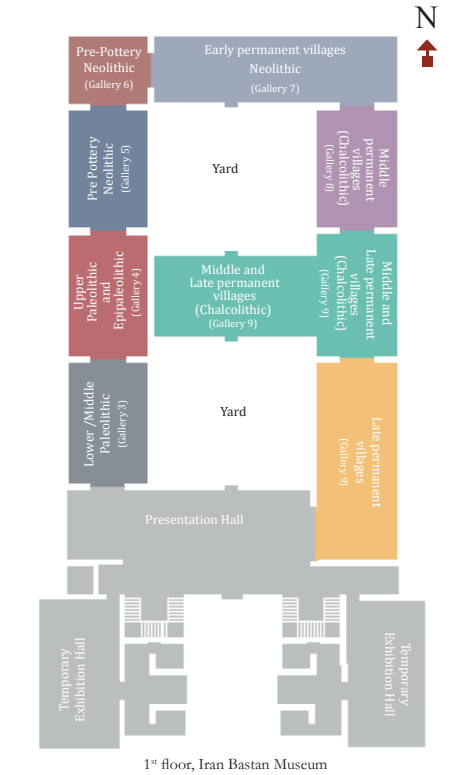
Irān Bāstān Museum

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



- ca. 2 million BP: 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.
- ca. 250,000 years BP: Neanderthals and early modern humans; Appearance of stone tool industry of Mousterian and use of Levallois method; Increasing use of caves for shelter.
- ca. 40,000 years BP: 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.
- ca. 20,000 years BP: 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.
- ca. 12,000 years BP: Beginning of the domestication of animals; Beginning of Agriculture; Making stone vessels; Manufacturing bladelet with pressure method.
- ca. 9,000 BCE: Beginning of village life; Production of pottery; Making clay and stone figurines; Use of copper in wickets method; Expansion of matweaving.
- ca. 4,500 BCE: Use of copper and gold and silver mining; Invention of the potter's wheel; Spinning and using the wool; Use of clay and stone flat seals; Use of animals in cargo and agriculture; Beginning of Urbanization.
- ca. 3,300 BCE: Invention of letter & writing; Developing of urbanization; Developing of exchanges and trade; Early Elamite government and old Elamite; Beginning of manufacturing of bronze objects.
- ca. 1,500 BCE: Using of Iron; Middle Elamite; Building of Chogha Zanbil temple.
- ca. 1,200 BCE: Appearance of local kingdoms; Making and expansion of Iron objects; Pottery rhythm; Forming of New Elamite I.
- ca. 850 BCE: Mannea Kingdom; Elipi Kingdom; Median Kingdom; New Elamite Kingdom I and II (making glazed pottery vessels (using metal oxides)).
- 559 BCE: 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; Redgigging Suez canal 516 BC; Coinage by the order of Darius.
- 330 BCE: Alexander's death 323 BC; Forming of Seleucid dynasty; Expansion of Hellenistic art in Iran.
- 250 BCE: Beginning of Parthian dynasty; Use of Parthian Pahlavi language and script; Feudalism system; Applying of stucco in architectural internal decoration.
- 224 CE: 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.
- 651 CE: (No specific event listed for this year in the timeline).

Prehistoric Galleries

The Paleolithic Period

Mobile Hunter-Gatherers

(ca. 2 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. The 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 3) 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 Kermānshāh, Lādiz in Sistān and Baluchistān, Shiwatoo in Kurdistān, Gakia in Kermānshāh, 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 games 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 Bozi) and central Iran (Mirak, Nīasar, Parvadeh, Zaviyeh) are on display in the museum (Gallery



Core - chopper Kashafrud Khorasan Razavi Lower Paleolithic



Trihedral Amar Merdeg Mehran plain, Lam Lower Paleolithic

Paleolithic Period

Upper Paleolithic

Early Neolithic

Neolithic

Chalcolithic

Bronze / Elamite

Iron Age I

Iron Age II

Iron Age III

Achaemenid

Seleucids

Parthians

Sasanids

651 CE



Levallois Core Harsin, Kermanshah Middle Paleolithic



Shell pendant Ali Tappeh Cave Mazandaran Epipaleolithic



Neanderthal pre-molar tooth, Wezmeh Cave, Islamabad, Kermanshah

Neolithic Period

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

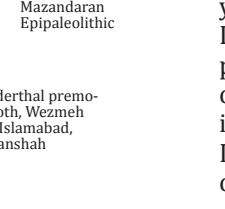
villages comprised of a handful of related families. The earliest of such villages were established in the piedmont regions of the Zagros Mountains, where wild species of wheat, barley, sheep, goat and pig were native. As these early villages managed to domesticate such species and attained control over 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.

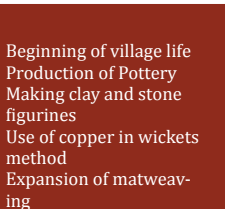
Similarly, the simple adobe houses of the of the early villages, made of packed mud (known as pisé) and thatched roofs, rapidly developed into multi-chambered houses made of mud bricks, and some were even decorated



Clay Boar Figurine Tappeh Sarab Kermanshah Neolithic period ca. 7000-6100 BCE Inv. No. 4568



Conical pottery bowl Tall-e Bakun A, Persepolis, Fars Chalcolithic period ca. 4500-4050 BCE Inv. No. 16



Pottery vessel Sialk, Kashan, Isfahan Transitional Chalcolithic ca. 5200-4800 BCE Inv. No. 8080



Painted pottery beaker Susa, Khuzestan ca. 4300-4000 BCE Inv. No. 412

Chlorite stone vessel Jiroft, Kerman Bronze Age, ca. 2400-1600 BCE Inv. No. 10706

Clay bust Shahdad, Kerman Bronze Age, ca. 2500-1800 BCE Inv. No. 1033

Painted pottery vessel Sokhteh, Sistan and Baluchestan Bronze Age, ca. 2800-2400 BCE Inv. No. 13261

Bronze disc-headed Pin Lurestan Iron Age, ca. 950-650 BCE Inv. No. 1459

Bronze axe head Zaluab cemetery, Kermanshah Iron Age, ca. 1200-1000 BCE Inv. No. 496

Location map and access routes to the National Museum of Iran

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