

## UNDER WESTERN EYES



## My last trip to Persia

(Part 16)

By a Canadian tourist

As soon as I walked into the hostel, I immediately felt like I was home. Almost everyone I met from my hostel is Esfahan was staying here. It was good to see Gallo and Joseph especially. I joined the group at their table immediately after I dropped my backpack on one of the beds in my dorm - a signal to others that the bed was now taken. Because it was still early in the afternoon, the sun was still strong which meant that everyone was just hanging out in the hostel until it got cooler. I should note that Yazd is in the middle of the desert so it is very hot during the day. I enjoyed being with a big group again. I ended up meeting one Finnish girl who was telling me all about her time in Iran. She has enjoyed her experience a lot but unfortunately.

The Finnish girl also told me that she was going to visit Iraq - more specifically the Northern part which she referred to as the "safe" part. It probably is safe but I think I will avoid Iraq all together. Besides, my parents would shoot me if they ever found out.

A lot of people at the table were writing in their diaries or typing on their laptop. Gallo, however, was the unique person of the group as he didn't maintain a journal but rather a scrapbook. He cuts out different things he sees in magazines or newspapers and pastes them into a book. Meanwhile he adds some of his own artwork to make it more visually appealing. I really liked this approach. It makes me think that I may want to start something like this when I get home. I think it is a great creative outlet.

By late afternoon, Gallo, the Finnish girl and I went walking around Yazd. We first went to the Jameh Mosque. Nice but nothing compared to the mosques we saw in Esfahan. The rest of the afternoon we just walked around the old part of Yazd. Yazd apparently is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. During our walk we didn't see anything special which was fine with me. Sometimes I just don't want to see anything. I would rather just walk around and today was one of those days. We did come across a lot of young kids who were more than eager to have us take pictures of them. We were more than happy to do so.

Shortly after our little tour of the town, we went out for supper. We were able to arrange a group of 10 people from the hostel to go to a nearby hotel that was known to serve a great buffet of Iranian food. Some of the people in the group went the previous night and said they ate like kings. I was fine with eating like a king for a night so I obviously joined them.



Jameh mosque built in the 12th century.

After supper, everyone went back to the hostel and relaxed but I was a bit restless. I ended up convincing two guys from the group - Joe from England and Chong from Singapore - to go out for a walk along the main road with me. I was surprised as the streets were pretty dead. The few locals we would walk by would say hello to us and each of them were more than happy each time we said hello back to them. I did notice three young guys sitting by a shoe shop just staring at us as we walked by. They were one of the few people not to say hello although I did say "Salaam" towards their direction just because it was habit to do so. Shortly after we walked by them, I noticed four kids playing football so I went up to them a challenged each of them to play one game against a foreigner. They were all more than happy to do so. I won the first three games but lost the last two. While I was playing the last two games the three guys who I earlier spotted sitting by the shoe shop came over to watch. When I was done playing, they came up to me and shook my hand and started talking to me. They explained that they normally don't talk to foreigners as they think we don't want to be bothered by locals but when they saw me volunteer to play football with the young kids they sensed that I was friendly enough and that I would be Ok with them approaching me. I was happy to hear that I gave off such a positive vibe. I told them they should do it more often as travelers enjoy it when locals talk to them. I explained that we were always approached by locals on the streets and they should therefore not hesitate to do the same. These three guys then invited Joe, Chong and I out for a tea. I looked over to Chong and Joe and they both nodded so I told the guys that we were in.

We ended up walking across the street and through a narrow alleyway into this very nice hotel that had a beautiful courtyard in the back. We found a carpet to sit on. The guys introduced themselves. There was Reza 1 (who spoke the best English and acted as the group translator), Reza 2 (who never spoke at all) and Massoud (who you could tell just loved being there with us). I felt bad as the whole time the guys were talking to me and totally ignoring Chong and Joe. I would try to get them involved in the conversation and they would answer but Reza and his crew would just nod after they spoke and then return to me. It made me a bit uncomfortable but I don't think Joe and Chong really cared as they were enjoying their tea and cookies. Most of the conversation was about what we (or I) thought about Iran and the people.

(Source: Tourists' personal blog)

(To be Contd.)

# Burnt City, key to lost civilization in a Desert



The Burnt City has been continually excavated since the 1970s by Iranian and Italian archaeological teams, with new discoveries periodically reported.

Burnt City, a land that has come from 5000-years ago, and has opened up its secrets to archaeologists to enable them to reveal its magnificence to the contemporary generation.

Thousands of years ago some people used to live on this desert land and its hot soil that is hard to bear today, who had their own civilization and architectural style, the remains of which that had once been buried under the layers of soil have now been pulled out of the ancient hills of the region.

Iran's 'Burnt City', a Bronze Age archeological treasure trove, was once one of the world's largest communities at the dawn of urban settlement.

The city, called Shahr-e-Sookhteh, sits on the banks of the Helmand river along the Zahedan-Zabol road in the southeast province of Sistan.

Covering an area of 151 hectares, the city was built around 3200 BC and abandoned over a millennium later in 2100 BC. The city experienced four stages of civilization and was burnt down three times. It took its eventual name because it was never rebuilt after the last fire.

The oldest known backgammon, dice and caraway seeds and numerous metallurgical finds, such as pieces of slag and crucible, are among the city's excavated artifacts. The unearthed game of backgammon is made of 60 pieces from turquoise and agate, and has a rectangular ebony board.

Other objects found at the site include a human skull with signs that suggest brain surgery was conducted on it in this prehistoric city.

The striking find reminds one of "The Story of Sinuhe", written in hieroglyph during the Egyptian Middle Kingdom around 2000 BC, in which Sinuhe, an Egyptian nobleman and a physician in the court of Amenemhet I, gives an account of open brain surgeries. The unearthed skull in Iran's Burnt City has discredited the belief based on Sinuhe's account that brain surgery originated in Egypt.

More than 600 skeletal remains have also been unearthed so far from the Burnt City's necropolis. The remains had been buried in more than 108 graves with some of the remains grouped together into graves containing three to eight bodies. At least two of the multiple graves were family plots apparently intended for family members who had died within a short period of time of each other.

The deceased residents of the Burnt City were buried in different positions - some were buried prostrate, some in a supine position and some lying on one-side. The most frequent position in burial was to lay the corpse on its side or to position the body into a kind of squat. Scientists believe that the variety in burial methods implies that different cultures coexisted within one society at the Burnt City.

## The Golden-eyed Woman

In December 2006, archaeologists discovered the world's earliest artificial eyeball in the city's necropolis, thought to have been worn by a female resident of the Burnt City. The artificial eye is a hemisphere with a diameter of just over 2.5 cm (1 inch). It consists of very light material, probably bitumen paste. The surface of the artificial eye is covered with a thin layer of gilding and is engraved with a circle at its center to represent the iris. The eye includes gold lines patterned like the rays of the sun. A hole has been drilled through the eyeball, through which a golden thread is thought to have held the eyeball in place.

Microscopic research has revealed that the eye socket of the female remains bear clear imprints of the golden thread, suggesting that the woman must have worn the eyeball during her lifetime. With her shining golden eye she must have been a striking figure, perhaps a soothsayer or an oracle. The woman with the artificial eye was 1.82 m tall (6 feet), much taller than the average women of her time. She was aged between 25 and 30 and had dark, exotic skin. Her Africanoid cranial structure suggests her origins were the Arabian Peninsula.

Experts say that her skeleton dates to between 2900 and 2800 BC, when the Burnt City was a bustling, wealthy city

and trading post at the crossroads of the East and the West. It is thought that the woman may have arrived at the city on a caravan from Arabia. Archeologists have not yet revealed the cause of the woman's death.

## The Ancient Courier

In one of the most recent discoveries from January, a team of Iranian and British anthropologists, working on human remains in the city from the 3rd millennium BC, identified a male camel rider who they believe was a messenger in ancient times.

Studies of the skeletal remains belonging to the man reveal evidence of bone trauma, suggesting that he was a professional rider who most likely spent most of his life on camel back.

Indications of riding are seen on the right leg bone of the man, who died at the age of 40 to 45. The swellings show that he continuously worked as a professional rider since he was a teenager. There are blade-shaped swellings on the lower part of the leg bone which indicate that he used to gather up his right leg while riding, suggesting that he rode on a large animal like a camel or ox. Although there is evidence showing that smaller draft animals were also used in the Burnt City, the act of gathering up a leg while riding is something that one does while riding a camel over long distances. Scientists, then, believe that the man was probably a courier who traveled regularly on camelback.

## Women's Role

Some paleoanthropologists believe that mothers in the Burnt City had social and financial prominence. 5000 year-old insignias, made of river pebbles and believed to belong only to distinguished inhabitants of the city, were found in the graves of some female citizens. Some believe the female owners of the insignias used them to place their seal on valuable documents. Others believe the owners may have used the seal to indicate their lofty status in society.

## Craftsmanship

Studies on 40 teeth unearthed in the Burnt City's cemetery show that the inhabitants of the city used their teeth as a tool for weaving to make baskets and other handmade products.

"More than 40 teeth lesions have been identified, the most prominent of which belongs to a young woman who used her teeth as a tool for weaving baskets and similar products," said Farzad Forouzanfar, director of the Anthropology Department of Iran's Archeology Research Center and head of the anthropology team at the Burnt City in an interview with CHN.

The use of teeth as a tool in the Burnt City is seen in both males and females of different age groups. Evidence shows that weaving was more than a hobby in the prehistoric city. It was one of the most common professions in the city which required a special skill. Residents made a variety of weaved products such as carpets, baskets and other household items.

Studies are currently underway by anthropologists from Iran's Archeology Research Center and England's Newcastle University. The scientists hope to study bone fragments and teeth found in various parts of the Burnt City, especially those unearthed in its cemetery, which may unravel the mysteries over some of the most common occupations practiced by the region's inhabitants.

The reasons for the unexpected rise and fall of the Burnt City are still wrapped in mystery. What seems especially bizarre about the city is its incongruity with nearby civilizations of the time. It is as if the city just appeared out of nowhere. Shahr-e-Sookhteh could eventually be the evidence to prove that an ancient civilization to the east of prehistoric Persia was independent from the civilization of ancient Mesopotamia.

The excavations at the Burnt City also suggest that the inhabitants were a race of civilized people who were both farmers and craftsmen. No weapon has ever been discovered at the site, suggesting the peaceful nature of the residents.

(Source: Press TV)



## CELEBRITIES

## Ravanipur: Author of misery and sunshine

By Afshin Majlesi

Moniru Ravanipur is an Iranian notable short-story writer and novelist. She has published a number of short stories, novels, children's books, and a series of essays.

She is best known for her short fiction story collections Kanizu and Satan's Stones as well as the three novels, including "The Drowned", "Heart of Steel", and "Gypsy by Fire."

A short story is a work of fiction that is usually written in prose, often in narrative format. This format tends to be more pointed than longer works of fiction, such as novels or books.

Short stories date back to oral story-telling traditions which originally produced epics such as Rostam and Sohrab.

Ravanipur's style relies mainly on the themes that deal with village customs in southern Iran where she was born and specially describes details of daily life of Iranian women.

Many short story writers define their work through a combination of creative, personal expression and artistic integrity. Ravanipur was born in a fishing village called



MONIRU RAVANIPUR

Jofreh which is located in southern Iran along the Persian Gulf.

She finished primary studies in her hometown, later the family moved to Shiraz where she received a bachelor's degree in psychology at the Shiraz University. Ravanipur made her debut with a collection of nine short stories entitled Kanizu. The book brought her wide popularity because of its innovative style.

She is able to portray the traditions and superstitions, cheerfulness, suffering and poverty in a manner that is both real and incredible. In 1989, Ravanipur published her first novel "The Drowned." The original style, formation, and subject matter distinguished her from other writers at that time.

The following year, Ravanipur published her second novel, "The Steel Heart."

In 1991 her second collection of short stories, Satan's Stones, was published in Iran.

She gained worldwide attention for the English translated version which was available in the United States in 1996.

Satan's Stones explores women's issues through an unusual combination of bold forceful narrative and insight into family relationships, just like Ravanipur's other works.

Translation of such books allows the English readers to be aware of the status of women in today Iran.

In 1991 she published a pair of children's books, "Sefid-e Barfi va (and) Golpar," as well as "Mah va Rangin kaman." These were followed in 1993 by her third short story collection, Siriya.

Her next work didn't come out until 1999, a novel entitled Gypsy by the Fire. "Frankfurt Airport Woman" was published in 2001 as her fourth collection of short stories.

Her works made her a leading author in the fresh generation of story writers who began publishing after the Islamic Revolution by adding a flavor from local histories, Iranian myths, and even some superstitions into her stories.