

## **Iranian Cultural Heritage Night Held in Vienna**

### **Austrian Iranologists Strongly Condemn the Destruction of Iran's Cultural Heritage**

On the evening of Friday, April 17, 2026, the Cultural Counsellorship of Iran in Austria (Iranian Wisdom House in Vienna) hosted a special cultural event titled “Iranian Cultural Heritage Night.” The gathering brought together Iranian and Austrian scholars, intellectuals, and prominent figures in Iranian studies, creating a unique and deeply thought-provoking atmosphere. The event’s main poster prominently featured the UNESCO Blue Shield — the international symbol for the protection of cultural heritage against aggression and damage — conveying a powerful message of the urgent need to safeguard humanity’s shared cultural treasures.

Unlike previous events that mainly celebrated the glory of Iran’s seven-thousand-year-old civilization, this gathering focused on the serious threats and damages inflicted upon this invaluable heritage. All speakers, emphasizing the “Blue Shield” symbol, strongly stressed the necessity of active and determined protection of these treasures of humankind.

The event, held from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., was attended by cultural heritage enthusiasts, artists, academics, and cultural activists in Vienna. It placed strong emphasis on the urgent need for global attention and action to protect Iran’s cultural heritage from damage and destruction.

Dr. Melanie Sindelar

## The Blue Shield: A Call for Active Global Protection of Cultural Heritage



Dr. Melanie Sindelar, Assistant Professor of Art Anthropology at Charles University in Prague, delivered a precise and comprehensive overview of Iran's cultural heritage in her speech. She examined the artistic and architectural dimensions alongside the anthropological aspects, highlighting bazaars, mosques, caravanserais, palaces, and iconic buildings that are filled with Iranian art and architecture.

Dr. Sindelar emphasized that a purely physical and visual examination is insufficient to truly understand the value of Iran's cultural heritage. She drew attention to the importance of the "inner language" of this heritage — a language that expresses the anthropological dimensions of Iranian civilization across different historical periods, sometimes in symbolic and coded forms, and sometimes more openly. According to her, this meaningful and anthropological layer elevates Iran's cultural heritage beyond mere physical structures and objects, transforming it into a living part of civilizational identity.

Dr. Sindelar then reviewed the key international legal documents and conventions on the protection of cultural heritage. Referring to these instruments and the Blue Shield emblem of UNESCO along with its historical background, she strongly condemned the attacks on Iran's cultural heritage as a flagrant violation of international law and its fundamental principles. She emphasized that such assaults not only destroy physical monuments and artifacts, but also inflict serious damage on the civilizational identity of a nation with thousands of years of history.

Professor Gulmar Kampinger-Khatibi

From Chehel Sotoun to Golestan: The Fragile Beauty of Iran's Tangible and Intangible Heritage



Professor Gulmar Kampinger-Khatibi, Senior Lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, divided Iranian cultural heritage into tangible and intangible categories. She presented a chronological list of Iranian sites and elements inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. She then described the most significant tangible heritage sites, highlighting their artistic finesse and architectural complexity, including Chehel Sotoun Palace, Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Abbasi Jameh Mosque of Isfahan, Falak-ol-Aflak Castle in Lorestan, and Golestan Palace in Tehran. She also referred to some intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional ceremonies like Yalda Night and Nowruz, as well as Iranian traditional foods, clothing, and attire.

She went on to discuss international conventions in detail and stressed the need to avoid any military aggression against the cultural heritage of countries, as well as the duty of all parties involved in wars to protect cultural heritage as part of humanity's common heritage. Referring to European history, she recalled the destruction of cultural sites during the First and Second World Wars and reminded the audience that Europe itself had been a victim of such attacks and has never forgotten the pain.

In the final part of her speech, Professor Kampinger-Khatibi detailed the damages inflicted on Iran's cultural heritage and described these harms as deeply regrettable and largely irreparable.

Professor Rüdiger Lohlker

## The Persian Garden and Cultural Genocide: When Destroying Gardens Means Killing Civilization



Professor Rüdiger Lohlker, the prominent Islamologist and Iranologist and retired Senior Professor at the University of Vienna, began by thanking the previous speakers and focused on two key aspects of Iranian cultural heritage: the Persian garden and its significance as world heritage.

He emphasized that the Persian garden remains one of the central and most influential elements of Iran's cultural heritage. Pointing to examples such as the "Dauphin" gardens and even parks designed by companies like Shell, he showed how the Persian garden model has served as the foundation for garden design in many parts of Europe, South Asia, and beyond. He particularly highlighted the Iranian concept of the "Chahār Bāgh" (fourfold garden) as a major influence on the design of European palaces and monasteries.

Professor Ulker stated: "Iranian culture is deeply intertwined with the concept of the garden." He warned that the destruction of Iran's libraries and gardens would be a great loss not only for Iran but for the entire world, since the global heritage of garden design is rooted in these patterns. In the concluding part of his speech, with a serious tone, he addressed the political and legal dimensions of the issue. He described statements by one of the leaders of the warring parties who spoke of the "destruction of Iranian civilization" as a declaration of Cultural Genocide. He considered this action not only a violation of international law but a complete disregard for humanitarian and international rights, attributing it to the "selective ignorance" of parties who either do not recognize or refuse to recognize the value and depth of Iranian culture.

Dr. Dieter Reinisch

Archaeology as a Weapon: How Politics Hijacks History in the Holy Land



Dr. Dieter Reinisch, historian and Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Britain, delivered a speech titled “(Re)Constructing Identity Between Science and Politics: The Role of Archaeology in Palestine.” In it, he offered a deep and critical examination of the role of archaeology in serving Israel’s expansionist policies.

Quoting a National Geographic article that “in the Holy Land, archaeology can be as political as kingship,” he emphasized that in no other country has scientific archaeology been so heavily subordinated to political-military objectives. He examined the situation in Israel and the occupied West Bank, where approximately 5,000 archaeological sites exist and Israeli archaeology operates under military protection both to facilitate settlement expansion and to legitimize Israel’s historical claims.

Citing Israeli archaeologist Talia Ezrahi (a member of the NGO Emek Shaveh), who said “Archaeology is a tool to show that we were here,” he pointed to the deliberate political use of archaeological science. Dr. Reinisch distinguished between “national archaeology” and “nationalistic archaeology,” describing Israeli archaeology as a combination of colonial and nationalistic archaeology that, through heavy machinery and selective methods, destroys Islamic and Arab layers to erase the historical presence of Arabs and Muslims and impose a one-sided historical narrative.

He concluded that as long as archaeology remains entangled with the Zionist identity structure, it cannot become an impartial and progressive science.

Dr. Reza Gholami

## Cultural Epistemicide: When Missiles Murder Time and Erase Humanity's Shared Memory

Dr. Reza Gholami, Cultural Counsellor of Iran in Austria and Assistant Professor at the Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies (IHCS) in Tehran, delivered the final speech. After thanking the attendees and fellow speakers, he said:

“Iran, with over seven thousand years of civilization, possesses a rich material and spiritual cultural heritage. We once condemned the Taliban’s destruction of Afghanistan’s heritage as a sign of barbarism, but today the United States and its offspring, Israel, are destroying Iran’s cultural heritage — a savage behavior that stands in complete contradiction to claims of modern civilization.



Iranian cultural heritage reflects the golden moments of human civilization and serves as a gateway to the world of self-awareness. Therefore, this heritage belongs not only to Iran but to the shared heritage of all humanity. Any damage to Iran’s cultural heritage is damage to the cultural heritage of all nations.

This is a global problem, and I am deeply shocked when I see some relevant experts in this field choosing silence. Even in Austria, many centers and researchers of Iranian studies have remained indifferent to the destruction of Iran’s cultural heritage. One cannot be an Iranologist and remain indifferent to the destruction of this heritage; such indifference means accepting the destruction of cultural heritage anywhere in the world — including in their own countries.

As previous speakers pointed out, some believe destroyed heritage can be rebuilt with money, but this is a mistaken idea. Reconstructed heritage will never be the same as the original, for it has lost its soul and authentic essence.

From a philosophical perspective, this phenomenon can be called Cultural Epistemicide: 'When missiles kill time.' The destruction of cultural heritage in war goes far beyond legal or material issues. According to Heidegger, human existence is fundamentally historical and experiences layers of time through objects, spaces, and buildings. When Golestan Palace in Tehran is severely damaged, it is not just stone and tile that are lost, but an entire horizon of meaning and a way of being in the world that can never be reconstructed.

Paul Ricoeur calls this process 'damage to narrative identity.' Every nation exists through the story it tells about itself over time, and its physical heritage is the anchor of that story.

Destroying it not only razes buildings but severs the human connection between past and future. This is a kind of 'murder of time' that is sometimes even more horrifying than killing people, because its victims have not yet been born."

Dr. Gholami concluded by expressing hope that no one would remain indifferent or silent on this issue. He urged UNESCO to address this tragedy with greater seriousness and stressed the need for strong international guarantees to prevent attacks on the cultural heritage of nations.



The event strongly emphasized the necessity for the international community to protect Iran's cultural heritage against damage and destruction. It severely condemned and described as shameful the actions of the United States and Israel in attacking Iran's cultural heritage during the illegitimate war they have launched against Iran.