

PREHISTORY IRAN HAFTAVÂN TEPE

By: Charles Burne

Haftavân Tepe, one of the three largest settlement mounds in the Urmia basin, North-west of Iran, covering fifty acres and not far from the village of Haftavân, itself barely two miles from the district town of Salmâs (known as Šâhpur under the Pahlavi dynasty) near Khoy.

This mound was chosen for a first season of excavations in 1968, with subsequent seasons in 1969, 1971, 1973, 1975, and 1978; the University of Manchester was the principal sponsor, the director was Charles Allan Burney.

Surface pottery gave promise of occupation levels dating from the 2nd and 1st millennia B.C.E. From the beginning the strategy was to avoid deep soundings, but instead to reveal evidence of successive cultural periods in whatever areas such strata might easily be exposed, the texture of the mound being unfortunately soft and crumbly. In the event, levels of eight cultural periods were uncovered, chronologically extending from mid-third millennium B.C.E. to mid-first millennium C.E., with one phase of abandonment lasting for two centuries. There were marked changes not only in pottery but also in building methods from one major period to the next.

Haftavân VIII. The earliest period investigated revealed two strata with successive circular buildings; the pottery also indicated a date around the end of the Early Trans-Caucasian II period at Yanik Tepe, near Tabriz, perhaps about 2600 B.C.E.

Haftavân VII. This period was investigated mainly on the summit of the mound, the citadel, where the massive buildings of mud-brick construction were relatively accessible. There was every indication of a peaceful period, resulting in a meager yield of pottery.

Haftavân VIC. After a phase of abandonment there ensued a sparse occupation, apparently mainly on the citadel. Painted Orange Ware gives a parallel with Hasanlu VII (q.v.).

Haftavân VIB. Early and Late VIB were two sub-periods, each ending with a marked burning, the first distinguished by its buildings and the second by its pottery, with only a limited continuity of ceramic forms from the earlier to the later sub-period. The settlement reached its maximum area during early VIB; only then does the greater part of the site appear to have been occupied by buildings, including massive terraced structures at the foot of the citadel mound.

Archaeomagnetic intensity tests on pottery of Haftavân VIC-VIB indicate a rather higher dating than first expected. With a gap following Haftavân VIC (ca. 2200-2000 B.C.E.) came the prosperous periods of Early VIB (ca. 1900-1550 B.C.E.) and Late VIB (ca. 1600/1550-1450 B.C.E.)

The Early VIB buildings were impressive for their scale and distinctive in the use of some timber reinforcements for the mud-brick walls; the pottery of this time includes beakers and black-on-red vessels paralleled in Trans-Caucasia. Thus, cultural influence from south to north is evident, the reverse of the tradition in Haftavân VIII-VII. On Late VIB pottery occur many representational motifs that include felines, equids, and waterfowl and other birds. Human figures are fragmentary, as is a representation of a vehicle drawn by two animals, more probably onagers than horses.

Relations between the Urmia basin and Trans-Caucasia were close in early VIB, but seemingly weakened after the destruction of the town. With Late VIB, "Urmia Ware," the painted pottery of Haftavân VIB, was no longer so widely distributed.

Haftavân VIA. This term, applied to levels excavated in an area at the eastern perimeter of the site in the 1968 and 1969 seasons, was later understood to be a misnomer, the pottery being recognized as Early VIB.

Haftavân V. This can be termed Iron I (ca. 1450-1100 B.C.E.), even though its material culture, notably the pottery, displays considerable continuity from Late VIB. There is a small percentage of dark grey burnished ware of unmistakably Iron I type.

Occupation was almost entirely confined to the west slope of the mound, with houses of a fair size but set quite widely apart, suggesting a marked decline in population. Building techniques had changed, with general use of stones set in mud, either as footings for mud-brick walls or, as with a likely storeroom, for entire structures

Haftavân IV. This can be termed Iron II (ca. 1100-800 B.C.E). Unlike the contemporary culture at Hasanlu, this seems to have been a relatively unimportant period in the long story of Haftavân Tepe. Poorly preserved, though quite spacious, building plans were recovered near the surface. More significant were the inhumation burials, well furnished with a variety of personal ornaments of bronze and iron and with beads, mostly carnelian.

Haftavân III. This period can be associated beyond doubt with the annexation of the Urmia basin to the kingdom of Urartu (Van) in the late 9th century B.C.E, the pottery providing the firmest dating evidence. By the end of the 1969 season, an extensive building had been exposed on the citadel, revealing a plan with consistent alignment. Near the southeast corner stood a row of five column-bases; the rooms were arranged round a central courtyard.

The pottery included distinctively Urartian wares, notably the fine red polished "palace ware" that occurs at most major sites in the kingdom. Significantly, this was found not on the floors of this building, where cooking pots stood, but in the debris from its destruction, fallen from rooms in an upper story.

This was no fortress but more probably the residence of an Urartian governor. Though Urartu retained control of the northern Urmia basin after the disaster of Sargon II's eighth campaign (714 B.C.E.), this governmental building was probably destroyed around that time, either by the Assyrians or by the Cimmerians (q.v.). While Urartian bowls of the 7th century B.C.E. have folded rims, those of Haftavân III have a simple profile, indicating an earlier context; a dating to about 825-715 B.C.E. is therefore indicated. Urartian occupation extended to areas outside the citadel. Thereafter the site lay deserted, perhaps until the late 6th century B.C.E.

Haftavân II. In the third season of excavation (1971), a massive mud-brick structure built into the steep north slope of the citadel was found and excavated. It was first thought to be a gateway, but it was found to have three sides, constituting a defensive tower. Of square plan, this was very well preserved, built of flat square mud bricks with walls 2.75 meters thick. The north walls survived to a height of eighteen brick courses; but from topmost to lowermost, given the steep slope, forty courses were preserved. To the west of this tower ran a large, two-meter-thick stone wall, clearly contemporary and thus belonging to what must have been formidable defenses encircling the summit of the mound. The citadel was ringed at its foot by a defensive ditch located in excavation areas west and east.

An early Achaemenid rather than Median context seems probable, perhaps associated with the reorganization of the empire by Darius I The Great (q.v.). The Urmia basin, under the name of Matiene, was then included in the 18th satrapy, along with the Saspirians and the last descendants of the people of Urartu, the Alarodians.

Haftavân IC-IA. Three phases of this, the final period of occupation, fall entirely within the period of Sasanian rule. The earliest phase (IC) has a perimeter wall defending the summit of the citadel and including a horseshoe-shaped tower, in date probably restricted to the first century or so of the Sasanian Empire. The site was apparently deserted during Parthian times.

A small cemetery marks the next phase (IB), with remains of a paved street (IA) sealing the graves, with no evidence of an Islamic date. A silver coin of Šâpur II (309-79 C.E.) provides some hint for dating the graves. Their contents included miniature glass bottles and miniature clear glass mirrors with silvered backing, as well as numerous black, white, yellow, blue, green and olive-green glass beads. These inhumation burials are consistent with a non-Iranian, non-Christian community, very possibly Armenian.

In conclusion, Haftavân Tepe appears to have served as an economic and at times also as an administrative center for the Salmâs plain, on the northwestern shore of Lake Urmia. It does not, however, seem to have stood on a major trade route, unlike Hasanlu.



Haftavan General View - Photo courtesy of ArchNet.org (Click to enlarge)



Haftavan General View Roof space - Photo courtesy of ArchNet.org (Click to enlarge)



Haftavan Carved Doorway - Photo courtesy of ArchNet.org (Click to enlarge)

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