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HAFT

HAFT (seven), the heptad and its cultural significance in Persian history. The number has been explained as the symbolic expression of a distinct culture and "the direct evidence" for its character (Leo Frobenius, apud Kirfel, p. 237). Among the Indo-European people, the number three seems to have been the most ancient of the sanctified numbers (Usener, Dumézil), followed by nine (Schroder and Nahring, II, pp. 678-79; Keith, pp. 409-13). For the Aryans of India and Iran, three, five, and seven had primary connotations (Keith, pp. 407-9), and the numbers specifically enshrined among the "Aves.tan people" (q.v.) are all combinations of those figures, e.g., three categories of Avestan texts, each divided into seven chapters (*nask*, see AVESTA); the liturgy of "Worship of the seven creations" (*Yasnā haptaŋhāiti*); twenty-one (3 x 7) *Yašts*; seven Amәša Spәntas (q.v.); and the seven divisions of the earth (see HAFT KEŠVAR; on the concept of the odd numbers as lucky, see Scheftelowitz, pp. 88-90). The number seven seems to have been considered as a totality (on the forms of this number in various Iranian languages see Bailey, *Dictionary*, pp. 498-99). Even the renovation of the world will be brought about by seven lords, the Zoroastrian Savior, Astvaṯ.ərәta (q.v.), who shall rise in the central region, and his six companions who represent the other six regions (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* I, p. 284).

The number seven has been revered by various nations as a mystic device denoting periodicity, completeness, and spiritual and mundane concepts (Graf; Varley; Andrian; Hehn, 1925; Roscher). Its sacredness for the Iranians was enhanced from the Median period onward, partially due to contact with

Mesopotamian culture, in which the heptad played a dominant role (Jensen; Hehn, 1907). “The seven counselors of the king” (*Ezra* 7.14) were the “royal judges” who administered the law and justice in the Persian Empire (Herodotus, 3.31), and seven field commanders led the Persian army despite its decimal organization (Herodotus, 7.82-83; see Shahbazi, 1994, pp. 88-89). With regard to the deities of the Persians, Herodotus states (1.131) that “the only gods whose worship has come down to them from ancient times” were seven: Zeus [Ahura Mazdā, q.v.], the sun, the moon, the earth, fire, water, and the winds. He adds that later the Persians increased their pantheon. When a Mede usurped the Persian throne, seven Persians of the highest rank overthrew him (Herodotus, 3.70-83), encouraged by an omen of seven eagles (3.77), and henceforth the “Seven Great Houses” shared the rulership of the empire so that a report circulated that Darius had divided the empire among them (Plato, *Epistle* 3, with Shahbazi, 1983, pp. 243, 246). They could wear the royal headgear (Plutarch, *Moralia* 820; similarly Balʿami, ed. Rowšan, I, p. 490 for the Sasanian period), and the sovereign was bound to marry into no family except theirs (Herodotus, 3.84). They governed large provinces and held the highest offices, forming a sort of advisory council for the king. They did not owe these privileges to the conspiracy against the Median usurper, as is often claimed. They had been leaders of the highest rank and it was precisely for that reason that they had gained access to the false king (Herodotus, 3.72, 77). The position of the Great King among his six magnates is analogous to that of Ahura Mazdā among the six Aməša Spəntas. Zoroaster and his first disciples had similarly made up a heptad (*Yt.* 13.95-96); and the example of the idea of the world renovation by Astvaṭ.ərəta and his six companions could not have escaped Darius and his helpers.

From Achaemenid times onwards, the seven magnates became an institution, a totality capable of achieving major tasks. Eunapius (frg. 3 in Blockley, II, pp. 32-33) remarks with amazement that “those who conspired with Darius against the Magi numbered seven, and, at a much later time, those who rebelled with Arsaces against the Macedonians were in the same number.” For the Sasanian period, an example is provided by the report that Kavād I fled to the Hephthalites with Zarmehr and five other supporters, making up a total of “*haft mard*” (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, VIII, pp. 37-38). On many occasions, the number seven excludes the ruler, witness “the seven princes of Persia and Media who saw the king’s face and sat first in the kingdom” (*Esther* 1.14), and Haftvād (q.v.), who rose from humble origins to the rulership with the help of his seven sons. The feudal lords of the Parthian and Sasanian times were

"Seven Magnates" (the houses of Surēn, Kāren, Zig, Mehrān, Spahbad, Spandiād, and Nahābad), who claimed to have been established as lords in seven provinces by Kay Vištāsp (Ṭabari, I, p. 683; Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 103-4). Reflecting on the conditions of Parthian and Sasanian times, the *Šāh-nāma* repeatedly speaks of *haft gord* "seven paladins," who accomplished valorous deeds, even when the heroes named number ten or eight, a remarkable discrepancy pointed out by Theodore Nöldeke (p. 52). Thus, Rostam fights Afrāsiāb (q.v.) with ten paladins (all named in *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, II, p. 104, vv. 12-14), but they are five times referred to as the *haft gord* (ibid., pp. 106, vv. 45, 47; 108, v. 65; 109, v. 83; 114, v. 137). Again, when Rostam goes to Turān to rescue Bēžan (see BĪŽAN), he takes with him eight paladins who are all named (Moscow ed., V, p. 60, vv. 883-89), but they are referred to as the *haft gord* (ibid., pp. 71, v. 1079, 73, v. 1123). Similarly, Ardašir I entered and captured the castle of Haftvād with seven magnates (*mehān*; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, VII, p. 150, v. 704); Bahrām Gōr went hunting with seven companions *(Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, VII, p. 348, v. 752); and Ḵosrow Parvēz met the chal-lenge of Bahrām Čōbin with "a pair of seven heroes" (*do haft gord*; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, IX, p. 118, v. 1842). Seven officials first swore allegiance to the Abbasid caliph al-Saffāḥ on his accession (Yaʿqubi, *Taʾrik*ò, pp. 417-18), and seven men did likewise to the caliph al-Motawakkel (*Tāriḵ-e gozida*, ed. Navāʾi, p. 322), and both of these caliphs are known to have been respectful of Persian traditions. Seven disciples of Shaikh Abu Esḥāq Kāzaruni made their abodes on Mount Lebanon and became known as the *haft tanān* "the seven (holy) persons" (Abu Esḥāq Kāzaruni, pp. 421-22). Seven notables made up the first circle of the disciples of Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ Qazvini Rāzi, p. 119)á, and Zayd of Ahvāz and seven heretics (all named) established the Qarmaṭi sect (ibid., pp. 310-11). The notion of the "seven notables" persists even in the Safavid period despite the dominant symbolism of the number twelve. When Solṭān-ʿAli, the head of the Safavid Order, was about to be overtaken by his enemies, he transferred his authority to his five-year- old brother Esmāʿil, and sent him "with seven Sufis" to Ardabil to establish his power base there (Možṭar, ed., p. 57). Several years later, Shah Esmāʿil I (q.v.) went with seven Sufis (all named) from Arjovān to Ṭārom (Možṭar, ed., p. 88), gathered an army of seven thousand men (Ḥasan Rumlu, ed. Navāʾi, I, p. 61; tr. Seddon, p. 41) from seven tribes (Lockhart, p. 17; eight tribes in Ḥasan Rumlu) and carved out a kingdom for himself. Following the death of Shah Esmāʿil II, seven magnates in unison guarded the Safavid crown and kept it for the legitimate heir, and seven magnates killed Solṭān-Moḥammad Ḵodā-banda, plunging the Safavid Empire into chaos (Falsafi, 1966, I, pp. 35, 136). In March 1736, Nāder

Shah sent seven magnates (all specified by name) to the representatives of Persian towns and tribes assembled in the plain of Moḡān in order to inquire about their decision on the election of a king (Falsafi, 1963, pp. 178-79).

The concept of the seven magnates has at times influenced religious beliefs: witness the Zoroastrian Savior noted above, the seven viziers of the Mazdakites (see below), the seven gods, and the First Man's seven appeals to the Father of greatness in Manicheism (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 185-86). Some Kurds maintain that the *haft tan*, seven divine forces personified as Imam ʿAli b. Abi Ṭāleb etc., dynamically manage world affairs in opposition to the *haft vāna*, seven evil forces personified as Afrāsiāb etc. (Keyvānpur, p. 14, n. 2, apud Moʿin, pp. 272-73). The early Ismaʿilis believed in "seven higher letters" as the archetypes of "seven prophets," "seven imams," and seven cyclical eras (Madelung, p. 203). The ideology of the Ismaʿilis, or the Sevener Shiʿites, is still dominated by various heptads. The Ahl-e Ḥaqq (q.v.) believe in "seven successive incarnations of the godhead" (*EIr* I, p. 636).

Mesopotamian and Hellenistic Planetary speculations (Röck) further fostered the mystical power of the number seven for the Iranians. Thus, to prove his sovereign power, the first king of Media is said to have fortified his capital Ecbatana (q.v.) with seven walls, the battlements of which were painted white, black, scarlet, blue, orange, silver, and gold respectively (Herodotus, 1.98). The details are all borrowed from Mesopotamian ideologies and architecture, but they became the stock features of Iranian traditions, e.g., the seven palaces built by Kay Us (Kāvōs) on the Alborz (Christensen, 1931, pp. 74, 108-9), by Siāvoš at Kang Dez (Christensen, 1931, pp. 74, 82-85, 108-9), and by Bahrām V (q.v.) were all seven-fold and painted in the seven colors. Iranian adaptation of the Babylonian system of attributing seven colors (or colored elements) to the seven planets may be inferred from the Syriac version of the *Alexander Romance* (based on a Pahlavi recension) of Pseudo-Callisthenes (tr. Budge, pp. 5-6): crystal represented the Sun [Mithra], adamant Māh (the Moon), red Vahrām, emerald "Nābo the scribe, who is called in Persian Tir," a white stone Bel/Hormazd, and a sapphire stone "Balti (the Lady), who is called in Persian Anāhid." In due course and under further Babylonian influences, the association developed into a four-fold scheme of seven palaces painted in the color of the seven planets who were guardians of seven climes (q.v.) as well as of the seven days of the week and who, together with the twelve signs of the Zodiac, inexorably influenced human life and destiny (e.g., *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, I, pp. 6-7; see further HAFTA, HAFT KEŠVAR, and *HAFT PEYKAR*).

The scheme was used by the Mazdakites, who maintained that under the Supreme Being “four powers direct the world with the help of seven viziers who act within a circle of twelve spiritual forces” (Yarshater, p. 1007). In later times this belief became a major preoccupation of Zoroastrian Iranians (Ringgern; Zaehner, pp. 158, 160-62, 254, 369, 374, 400, 410; Shahbazi, 1991, pp. 53-54) and gained even greater prominence in the Islamic period, when the number seven was given additional symbolism (Hartmann-Schmitz, pp. 12-120).

“Seven” often conveys the ideas of perfection and periodicity. The *Šāh-nāma* alone attests the following additional instances: *sarā-parda-ye haft-rang* “seven colored tent/pavilion” (ed. Moscow, I, p. 109, v. 500; II, p. 212, v. 545); *haft-čašma gohar* “a gem of seven precious stones,” bequeathed by Ferēdun (q.v.) to Iraj and inherited by his descendants (ed. Moscow, IX, p. 220, v. 3530); seven treasures of Ḵosrow Parvēz (ibid., p. 236); seven days of ceremonies (thanksgiving: ed. Khaleghi, I, p. 61, v. 839; ed. Moscow, VII, p. 375, v. 1007; marriage festivities: ed. Khaleghi, I, p. 263, v. 1418; II, p. 304, v. 1519; ed. Moscow, VII, p. 429, v. 2194; mourning: ed. Khaleghi, III, pp. 381, v. 33; ed. Moscow, VII, p. 429, v. 2194; rest and celebration: ed. Khaleghi, I, p. 341, v. 156; II, pp. 44, v. 605, 257, v. 834, 316, v. 1709, 453, v. 472; III, pp. 40, v. 199, 298, v. 158; ed. Moscow, VII, p. 375, v. 1007; deliberation: ed. Khaleghi, I, p. 263, v. 1418; II, p. 304, v. 1519; ed. Moscow, VII, p. 429, v. 2194); seven years to achieve a goal (Gēv searching for Kay Ḵosrow in Turān: ed. Khaleghi, II, pp. 421, v. 40, 425, v. 94, 436, v. 261; the building of the palace of Madāʾen: ed. Moscow, IX, pp. 233, v. 3742; the weaving of the brocade tapestry of the Ṭāqdēs throne: ed. Moscow, IX, pp. 225, v. 3603); Šāpur and Hormozd-Ardašir both were hidden from Ardašir for seven years (ed. Moscow, VII, pp. 159, v. 78, 169, v. 252); seven-year tax remission (ed. Moscow, VII, p. 398, v. 1651). The old concept of the “Seven-year drought” (*Genesis,* 41.26-30) also occurs (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, VIII, p. 10, v. 74; for a historical case in the Islamic period see Ebn Fondoq, p. 268).

Topography also uses the heptad. Particularly persistent is the idea of the seven *kešvar*s. The Parthian provinces (*belād al-Pahla*) were traditionally reckoned as seven (Šērōya son of Šahriār, apud Yāqut, *Boldān* VI, p. 407). And the idea of the seven-fold regions of the world is well attested in *Vis o Rāmin* (Gorgāni, pp. 93 v. 8, 110 v. 33), which is thought to be based on a Parthian core (Minorsky). The Sasanians symbolized the idea of the “seven *kešvar*s by placing on their Nowruz table sacred twigs” on which the names of the seven

regions were inscribed (Kesrawi [apud [Pseudo-]Jāḥez], p. 362). According to a tradition reported by Ferdowsi (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, IX, p. 223), the throne of Ḵosrow (Ṭāqdēs) was ornamented with images of the seven regions as well as the seven planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac. Other related instances included: the seven cities making up the capital of the Sasanian Empire (Christensen, *Iran Sass.*, pp. 383-89); seven mountains (*haft kuh*) of Māzandarān, which Rostam had to cross during his *haft ḵᵛān* (q.v.; *Šāh-nāma*, ed. Khaleghi, II, pp. 40, v. 535, 41, v. 551); the village of Haftkand (or Haft dar "having seven gates") near Asadābād of Hamadān (Ebn Ḵordādbeh, pp. 23, 201), the Haft Deh "Seven villages" area near Ozkand on the border of Iran and Turkestan (Eṣṭaḵri, tr., p. 267), Haftān (between Isfahan and Izadḵᵛāst, Haftād-pahlu in Lorestān (Schwarz, *Iran*, pp. 563, 941), the seven seas (*Ḥodud al-ʿālam*, ed. Sotuda, p. 14). Solomon's burial place was said to have been "somewhere between the seven seas" (*Tarjoma-ye tafsir-e Ṭabari* I, p. 40). The archaeological sites of Haft Tepe, Haftavān Tepe, and Haft Čogā are well known, and shrines attributed to the "Haft tan" of various origins are scattered throughout Persia, the most celebrated one being that in Shiraz. In mysticism, the Sufis distinguish seven valleys (*haft wādi*) or seven cities (*haft šahr*) of love as stations leading to God, seven spiritual points in the body, and seven mystical degrees (Moʿin, I, pp. 274-75).

The heptad was also associated with various skills and social divisions, as in the seven systems (*dastgāh*) of Sasanian court music, and the scripts and seven styles of writing used by the Sasanian secretaries (Inostran-sev; Abu Jaʿfar Mōbad Motawakkeli, quoted by Ḥamza Eṣfahāni, apud Bahār, *Sabk-šenāsi* I, pp. 98-100). It is said that the Sasanian court officials were divided into seven classes (Masʿudi, *Moruj* II, p. 156) and that Ḵosrow Anōširavān divided the Caucasus Turkish tribes who joined him into seven ranks according to merit (*Kār-nāma Anōšaravān*, tr. Grignaschi, p. 24 with n. 76 at p. 42). In 410 C.E., the Christians of Persia organized their own church hierarchy in seven major dioceses (Christensen, *Iran Sass*, pp. 271-72).

The heptad plays a significant role in the rites and customs of all Iranians. For the Zoroastrians, seven is the number of the creations and of the Amahraspands (Aməša Spəntas), who guard them. The keeping of the seven annual feasts (the six seasonal feasts of five Gahānbārs (q.v.) and the Nowruz) is a regular, solemn, and obligatory act of devotion (Boyce, *Stronghold*, pp. 17-18, 30-31). The seventh, Nowruz, has "many and varied rites containing the number seven" (Boyce, *Stronghold*, p. 50; see also pp. 168, 215, 230-31). The

lork, consisting of seven dried fruits, is served on festive occasions (especially at weddings) as well as on the day of Farvardingān (Āḏargošasp, p. 228; see FRAWARDĪGĀN). The number seven also recurs in the Nirang ceremony, in the daily retying of the sacred girdle (*kosti*), in *no-šwa* (purification) ritual, in the septennial observance of removing the cleansed bones of the dead from the well of a *daḵma*,and in other funerary rites (Boyce, *Stronghold*, pp. 93, 104, 137, 195, 198, 209). On the Tirgān (day Tir of month Tir) Zoroastrians used to wear a thin armband called *tir o bād*, made of seven silk treads woven with a thin wire, and removed it on the day of Bād, ten days later (Āḏar-gošasp, p. 230). Persian Muslims perform the seven-fold rituals of *ṭawāf* (circumambulation) and the throwing of seven small stones at a place called Jamharat al-ʿaqaba, considered to symbolize Satan, during the pilgrimage to Mecca. Many drinks and food were (and are) associated with the number seven (Moʿin, I, pp. 295-98, 301-3; see also NOWRUZ). On joyous occasions it was customary to drink seven cups of wine (*Šāh-nāma*, ed. Moscow, VII, pp. 322, v. 300, 323, v. 319). Trays containing seven kinds of grains, seven kinds of sweets, seven kinds of fruit, and seven kinds of dried roasted seeds (*ājil-e haft toḵm*) adorn wedding banquets and Nowruz tables (still reflected in the *Haft sin*, q.v.). In Khorasan seven bundles of wood are burned at Čāršanba-suri (q.v), and at Ḵᵛor in central Iran seven niches are provided in each dwelling to house the seven vessels of the *sabza* (green) grown for Nowruz (Honari, pp. 75, 118). Seven is an integral part of the Nowruz ceremonies and marriage rituals as well as funerary rites and the folklore associated with pregnancy, childbirth, childhood, and marriage (Massé, *Croy-ances*, pp. 29-118). Seven items (*haft-qalam*) are used in the ideal makeup (*har haft* or *haft dar haft)* of a bride (see Moʿin, I, pp. 299-300). Dishes presented in the most elaborate banquets are called *haft-rang* "[of] seven colors." An armband made of threads died in seven colors is given to the bride at some local weddings (cf. above for the Zoroastrian *tir o bād*), while a newborn child was named on the seventh day.

Cosmology also used the heptad. Ursa Major is termed "Seven thrones" (*Haft-owrang*, q.v.), and elaborate ideas about the seven heavens and seven earths (Hartmann-Schmitz, pp. 17-42) became widely accepted. A tradition asserted that the world endures fourteen thousand years from the Creation to the Resurrection, "seven thousand spent in the act of creation and seven thousand in maintaining it" (*haft hezār sāl andar āfaridan o haft hezār sāl andar dāštan*; *Tarjoma-ye tafsir-e Ṭabari*, p. 968).

The number seven is frequently associated with books. The Qurʾān, the *Šāh-nāma*, Abu Yaʿqub Esḥāq b. Aḥmad Sagzi's *Kašf al-maḥjub*, and a host of other influential books follow a seven-fold division. Various stories and treatises bear names combined with "seven" as a sign of completeness. They include Neẓāmi Ganjavi's *Haft pey-kar (*also called *Haft gonbad*), Jāmi's *Haft owrang* (Ṣafā, *Adabiyāt* IV, p. 359), Ḵᵛāja ʿAbd-Allāh Anṣāri's *Haft ḥeṣār* (ibid., II, p. 912), ʿAbd-Allāh Hātefi's *Haft manẓar* (ibid.,IV, pp. 192, 442, 446), Zolāli Ḵᵛānsāri's *Haft ganj,* also called *Haft sayyāra* and *Haft āsiāb* (ibid., V, pp. 968-69*)*, and Kāšef Širāzi's *Haft peykar* (ibid., V, p. 1763). The *Haft laškar* is a short prose version of the *Šāh-nāma*, from Gayomart to Bahman (ibid., V, p. 1519), while the *Haft band* of Ḥasan b. Moḥammad Kāši (ibid., III, p. 748) is a Shiʿite classic.

The number seven is used also in proverbs (e.g., "the cat has seven lives") and metaphors, and as synonyms of many names and ideas. Some two hundred of these have been collected by Moḥammad Moʿin (I, pp. 302-3).

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