



## TEPE HISSAR

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**TEPE HISSAR** (Tappa Heşār), prehistoric site located just south of *Dāmḡān* in northeastern Persia. To the north lie valleys rich in flint, lead, wood, fruit, deer, stag, boar, fish and fowl; to the south, the periphery of the great desert (*kavir*), with known occurrences of copper, gold, turquoise, semi-arid fauna, and herds of gazelles and onagers (Dyson and Tosi, fig. 4). The present mound covers an area of 200 x 300 meters; formerly, it covered about 600 meters (Schmidt, 1937, fig. 16). A Sasanian palace was excavated at 2,200 m to the southwest (Schmidt, 1937, pp. 327-46).

Objects found in 1877 (Schindler) were catalogued around 1925 (Herzfeld, n. 44). In 1931 and 1932, excavations were undertaken by the University of Pennsylvania Museum (Schmidt, 1933, 1937). A surface survey was carried out in 1972 (Bulgarelli, 1972, 1979). In 1976 a re-study project was fielded by the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Turin University, and the Iran Center for Archaeological Research (Dyson and Howard). In 1995 salvage work was done by the Iran Cultural Heritage Organization (*Sāzmān-e mirāṭ-e farhangi*; Abdi).

Sixteen hundred graves were recorded; of these 782 from 1932 formed the basis of the 1937 tabular presentation of burial data. Specifically described graves include only 33 for Hissar I, 24 for Hissar II, and 38 for Hissar III (Forest, p. 314). Four rich graves of Hissar IIIC were found in 1931 (Schmidt, 1933: pls. CXLVII, CLII-CLV, pp. 442-52). Some of the skeletal remains have been restudied since Wilhelm Krogman's 1940 study, using different techniques (Nowell; Rathbun). Generally, bodies were buried on their sides in a flexed position in simple pits. In period II, however, rare brick cist graves



appear (Schmidt, 1937, pl. CXI, p. 389). Forest provides a detailed analysis of burial customs.

Based on his analysis of burial ceramics, Erich Schmidt identified three major periods. Period I was subdivided into IA (earliest), IB and IC. The separation between IC and IIA is unclear; the term IC/IIA better reflects this uncertainty. Period II(B) and III(B and C) are well-defined; IIIA is ephemeral. The 1976 radiocarbon determinations support the following chronology: IC/IIA: about 3980-3865 cal. BCE, IIB: c. 3365-3030 cal BCE, IIIB: ca. 2400-2170 cal. BCE; and IIIC 2170-1900 cal. BCE (Voigt and Dyson, I, pp. 173-74). Period IB should then be about 4000 BCE and earlier, while IA should be sometime after 5000 BCE, since it clearly follows the Cheshmi Ali (Čašma 'Ali)-Sialk II painted ware horizon of about 5500 BCE (Esfandiari).

Architectural remains for Hissar I consist of fragmentary *čína* walls with traces of mud-brick. Rooms are rectilinear but no complete building plans were recovered. In period IIB walls with regularly spaced exterior buttresses appear (Dyson and Remsen, figs. 9, 12, pp. 84-89). On the Main Mound structures dated to IIIB by Schmidt (1937, fig. 86) can be shown to belong to Hissar IIB (Howard, 1989, fig. 1, pp. 56-59), as originally proposed in Schmidt's field notes. Brick sizes range from 47 x 23 x 11 cm in period I to 65 x 33 x 9 cm in period IIIB. The Burned Building of IIIB has various interpretations due to the richness of its contents and the presence of burned bodies and flint arrowheads (Dyson, 1972). Its plan was completed in 1976 (FIGURE 1). A small fire altar suggests that it may be a shrine (Dyson and Remsen, fig. 15, pp. 91-98). Rows of rectangular rooms of IIIC date above the Burned Building, associated with ritual objects, appear to be significant (Schmidt, 1937, fig. 1102, p. 177).

The subsistence economy was based on agriculture. From Hissar II onward plant remains indicate “an agricultural system based on cereals [glume and free-threshing wheats, naked and hulled barley] and the utilization of local fruit [olive, grapevine] plant resources” (Costantini and Dyson, p. 66). Lentil seeds and legumes were also present. Cattle and sheep figurines indicate herding activities (Mashkour).

From the beginning full-time craft specialists mass-produced standardized painted pottery (Hissar I-IIA). Hissar I ware, handmade in IA and wheel-made in IB, consisted of painted buff, painted red, and plain utility ware; a crude late painted ware still occurred in period IIB, along with a coarse ware tempered



with crushed slag (Pigott, Howard, and Epstein). Hissar I painted ware is decorated with geometric, plant, and animal motifs (gazelles, ibexes, and birds; [FIGURE 2](#)). Shapes consist of small cups and bowls, and bowls (shallow and deep) on pedestal stems with flaring bases. Burnished grey ware becomes predominant in period IIB and III, produced in a reducing fire from the same local clays. In IIB cups on high pedestal stands appear; in III canteens and bottle-pitchers replaced them. As with pottery, the uniformity and skill seen in the artifacts (and the quantity of slag and furnace linings) suggests full-time specialists. In Hissar I daggers, knife blades, arrowheads, pins, tacks, points, and needles were made. In Hissar II and III copper artifacts increase in quality and variety (Pigott, Howard and Epstein, p. 222) and include personal ornaments (earrings, pendants, bracelets, bands), tools and weapons (bidents, lances, mattocks, chisels, maceheads), and luxury items (vessels, mirrors, boxes and intricately cast pins and rods). Lab study shows “remarkable technological conservatism persisting from Hissar I through III” (Pigott, 1999). In Hissar IIB lead, silver, and gold were added to copper for the first time ([FIGURE 3](#)).

While western connections are visible in the ceramics and button-seals of Hissar I (McCown, pp. 7-11), many connections with Margiana (Marv) and Bactria occur in Hissar IIIC. These include mini-columns, alabaster discs, animal figurines, bidents, tridents, axe-adzes, compartmented copper stamp seals, lanceheads with bent tangs, metal horns, cosmetic bottles, beads with incised circles, etc. Four rich burials from 1931 belong to this period as does a large “hoard” of pottery copper, gold and alabaster objects (most likely a cenotaph like those found in Baluchistan and Central Asia; Amiet, 1986). The 1976 excavations produced one clay or tablet with signs and nine blank pillow-shaped tablets in Hissar II (Tosi and Bulgarelli, pp. 38, 40, figs. 6, 8). Additional (unpublished) tablets with signs were excavated in the 1995 salvage excavation.

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