Rediscovering Hasanlu

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The unexpected discovery in 1958 of the now famous "Hasanlu Gold Bowl" in a burned occupation level at that site led to extensive excavation of the early Iron Age settlement. This prehistoric cultural period at Hasanlu, located in northwestern Iran, begins in the second half of the 2nd millennium B.C. and ends around 800 B.C. Later remains, also of the Iron Age, come from the historically known Urartian and Achaemenid periods. The excavations were part of the Hasanlu Project which ran from 1957 through the summer of 1977; they were sponsored by The University Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, and the Archaeological Service of Iran.

When the Project was initiated, its general goal was to reconstruct the cultural history of the Solduz-Ushnu valley. This was to be achieved through excavation of a series of stratified occupation levels that spanned the prehistoric period in this region, beginning with the first Neolithic settlements around 6000 B.C. and ending with the conquest of Iran by Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C. Excavations were carried out at several sites in addition to Hasanlu in order to accomplish this broad objective; the most intense research focus was, however, on the Iron Age. The study was long-range and interdisciplinary, and formed a model for several later projects in other parts of Iran.

The description of cultural change was to be based directly on archaeological evidence, independent of linguistic arguments and speculation based on historic documents from adjacent regions. Subsequently, other scholars have used such arguments to identify ethnic groups within northwestern Iran, and to interpret the Iron Age remains at Hasanlu. In view of the continuing process of analysis of the Hasanlu materials, their conclusions must be regarded as provisional.

The Process of Discovery and Interpretation

In any archaeological project, the process of discovery and interpretation involves a complex interaction between excavation strategy and ongoing analysis of the recovered data. As excavation proceeds, accidents of preservation directly affect the interpretation of the deposits encountered, raising a series of

1
Air view of the mound of Hasanlu in 1957. The high, central part of the site is outlined by military trenches and foxholes cut during World War II. Centered within are the remains of a large enclosure dated to Islamic times. Cutting outward from the center of the mound (top center) is the first exploratory trench dug by the Hasanlu Project (1956). Surrounding the central High Mound (also referred to as the "Citadel") extends a Lower Mound (also referred to as the "Outer Town"). Trenches cut into the Lower Mound (upper right) were made prior to 1956 by the village landlord, plundering the Iron Age cemetery. On the slope of the High Mound in the foreground are round and square towers of dung cakes, fuel stored for the winter.

2
From a distance, the site of Hasanlu is visible as a flat topped hill that rises 25 m above the alluvial plain. This hill is entirely artificial, consisting of occupation debris deposited over thousands of years.

3
Air view of Hasanlu in 1962, looking north; the buildings of the Lower and Upper Courts are in the foreground (Fig. 11). The small black dots to the right are workmen, observing the helicopter from which this photo was taken.

technical questions often resolved only by further seasons of excavation.

At the same time, the study of excavated architecture and artifacts is fundamentally affected by the discovery of new remains at other sites, and by the consequent revision of broad historical or theoretical structures of interpretation. This interactive process is one of continuous learning, requiring periodic reassessment of the conclusions reached at any given stage of the investigation. Hypotheses formulated about the Iron Age in western Iran in the 1960s, for example, are now being reformulated as the result of the accumulation of new data (compare Young 1963 and 1985). The process explains why continuing field work is so valuable and why so much time is required to produce integrated final reports when the work is done.

The Problem of Preliminary Conclusions

A season of field work provides the excavator with a set of initial impressions and some seemingly obvious conclusions based on the information in hand. Following each field season, those people interested in the project want instant interpretation of the finds: how old they are, what they were used for, how were they made, who were the people responsible, and so forth. Usually the excavator produces some reasonable response to these demands in a preliminary report. If work continues, such responses are inevitably modified or even proved wrong.

At Hasanlu, for example, we encountered a major fortification wall 3 m thick, with massive stone foundations, bastions, and towers, surrounding the top of the High Mound (Figs. 4, 6). In 1958 we associated this wall with the burned Iron Age level of 800 B.C. (Hasanlu period IVB); it is now clear that this conclusion was erroneous, and that the wall belongs to a later Urartian occupation (period IIIB; see Fig. 5). How did we make this mistake? The answer illustrates the process of discovery and interpretation just described.

When the wall was discovered, no comparable architecture had been described in northwestern Iran. It was only after 1960 that securely dated Urartian structures began to be published as a result of surveys carried out by field teams from the German Archaeological Institute in Tehran. The results of these surveys led in part to a reassessment of the date of the Hasanlu wall, a re-evaluation already suggested by continuing excavation.

The fortification wall was found during the excavation of Burned Building I-West (Figs. 4, 11). Excavation had progressed across the scorched and blackened floor of its central columned hall, and had ended neatly against the face of the stone foundation of the fortification wall. The latter lay at a right angle to the hall's side walls, and appeared to form the back wall of the room. In the absence of evidence to the contrary we concluded that we had cleared a unified structure that belonged to the period of the great fire (Hasanlu IVB).

This conclusion seemed to be confirmed by the recovery of burned debris lying against other parts of the fortification wall, inside the nearby West Gate and at the foot of Tower 4 (Fig. 6). Four years

4
A massive fortification wall with deeply cut foundations was traced around the top of the High Mound at Hasanlu. Although it was originally thought to be part of the settlement destroyed by fire in 800 B.C. (period IVB), it has now been dated to the succeeding Urartian occupation (period IIIB). In this aerial photo, the wall curves around the eastern edge of the High Mound (left), truncating the remains of a period IVB building (Burned Building I-West). A massive tower, its exterior not fully excavated, is clearly visible at top left (Tower 3), just below the narrow West Gate.

Relationship Between Archaeological Periods at Hasanlu and the History of Adjacent Regions
(Data on Assyria and Urartu derived from Oppenheim 1977)

Assyria		Hasanlu Periods Estimated Dates	Urartu
		Hasanlu VI	
		ca. 1450 B.C.	
Aššur-uballit I 1363-1328 B.C.	IRON I	**Hasanlu V**	
		ca. 1250 B.C.	
Tukulti-Ninurta I 1243-1207 B.C.		**Hasanlu IVC**	
Šamši-Adad IV 1053-1050 B.C.		Fire ca. 1100 B.C.	
Aššurnasirpal II 883-859 B.C.	IRON II		
Shalmaneser III 858-824 B.C.		**Hasanlu IVB**	Amaru ca. 850-840 B.C. Sarduri I ca. 840-830 B.C. Ispuini 830-810 B.C. Menua 810-786 B.C.
		Destruction ca. 800 B.C.	
		Hasanlu IVA Fire abandonment ca. 750 B.C.	
Tiglath-pileser III 744-727 B.C. Sargon II 721-705 B.C. Esarhaddon 680-669 B.C. Aššurbanipal 668-627 B.C. Aššur-uballit II 611-609 B.C.	IRON III	**Hasanlu IIIB**	Rusa II 685-645 B.C. Sarduri III 645-635 B.C. Rusa III 625-609/585 B.C.
		ca. 600 B.C.	
Median Conquest 614-612 B.C.		**Hasanlu IIIA** (Medes?)	Median Conquest 594-590 B.C.
Achaemenid Empire 538-332 B.C.		(Achaemenids?)	Achaemenid Empire 549-331 B.C.
		ca. 300 B.C.	
		Hasanlu II	

5
Chronological chart.

later (in 1962) Burned Building III was excavated in the northwest quadrant of the High Mound and the pattern appeared to be repeated: the inner face of the fortification wall seemed to form the rear wall of a rectangular room, located at the back of the building.

It was not until 1972, when excavation was undertaken on the south side of the mound behind Burned Building II, that a well-preserved stratigraphic section revealed unequivocally that the fortification wall sat in a huge foundation trench dug into the burned ruins of Hasanlu IVB (Figs. 7, 11). The wall's construction could now be seen to have taken place during the subsequent Urartian period of the 8th/7th century B.C. (Hasanlu period IIIB; Figs. 6, 8). This interpretation was based on the wall's stratigraphic position (within a foundation trench cut from above Burned Building II), the pottery associated with its use, and its plan. The latter could be seen to duplicate features of Urartian fortresses of the same date newly documented elsewhere in northern Azerbaijan. The stratigraphic sequence was confirmed in 1972 and in 1974 while exploring the road system on the west slope (Fig. 11). The whole process of discovery and final interpretation had taken 6 field seasons spread over 12 years!

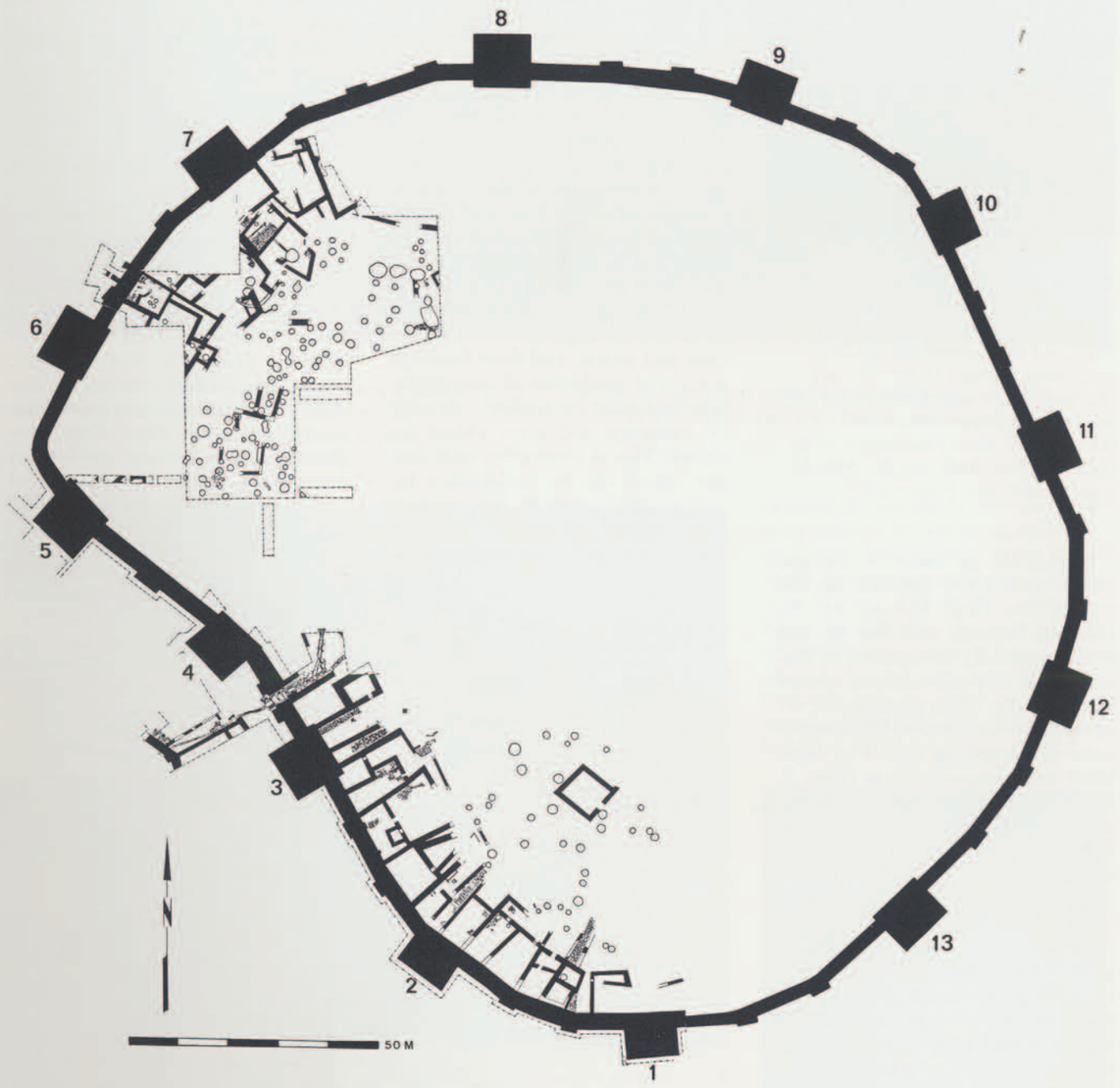
Excavations on the High Mound

Hasanlu is the largest site in the Gadar River valley, which runs from the Zagros mountains on the west, eastward to the marshy southern shore of Lake Urmia. The western half of the valley is called Ushnu, while the eastern half is called Solduz. The valley provides a direct route from the borders of Assyria on the west to highland Iran on the east.

The site of Hasanlu consists of a high central mound that rises 25 m above the plain and is about 200 m in diameter at the top (the "High Mound," sometimes referred to as the "Citadel"). Around its base is a low, flanking mound that rises about 8 m (the Lower Mound, also

referred to as the "Outer Town"). At its widest point the site extends approximately 600 m from one edge to the other (Figs. 1, 3). These existing limits are, however, artificial since vineyards have been cut into the sides of the Lower Mound, and part of the site is known to run under the present village of Hasanlu.

Excavations over the years have sampled several areas of the Lower Mound. During the Iron Age this part of the site served as a cemetery and a number of burials have been recovered from it, especially from the northern side (see Dyson, "Architecture," this issue). In fact, it was material recovered from such burials that drew attention to Hasanlu as early as the 1930s, and led the British archaeologist Sir Aurel Stein to visit the site and to make several small soundings in 1936.



6
Preliminary plan of the Urartian citadel built in Hasanlu period IIIB. The nature of the settlement within the massive fortification wall is most clearly seen to the lower left. Small barracks-like rooms were built up against the wall, separated by narrow paved paths leading to great rectangular towers. In the open central part of the site were deep pits, presumably used for storage. (Drawn by the author)

7
This stratigraphic section clarified the relationship between the 8th century fortification wall (period IIIB) and the burned 9th century settlement (period IVB). The red (burned) walls and debris to the left are cut by a foundation trench (center); the stone foundation to the right was then built and the trench was refilled with brown soil.

Beginning in 1958 systematic excavations were initiated on the top of the High Mound by the Hasanlu Project, and the burned level eventually designated as Hasanlu IVB was encountered almost immediately. This remarkable set of remains consisted of brick structures still standing 2 to 3 m high, filled with burned debris (Figs. 9, 11). Much of their contents still lay on the first floor, covered by the fallen debris of second floors which contained additional artifacts.

A large area in the southern half of the High Mound was cleared, revealing a complex of buildings grouped around an Upper and a Lower Court (Figs. 4, 11). Excavations on the western side of the mound traced a triple road and gate system, as well as another large building with associated architectural remains (Burned Building III). Large quantities of charcoal were recovered from the buildings. Radiocarbon dating of this material provided us with chronological relationships between areas of the site and between the various architectural units; this chronology is independent of pottery and artifacts. Radiocarbon determinations also provide evidence for the absolute chronology of the site (Fig. 5; see also Dyson and Muscarella 1989).

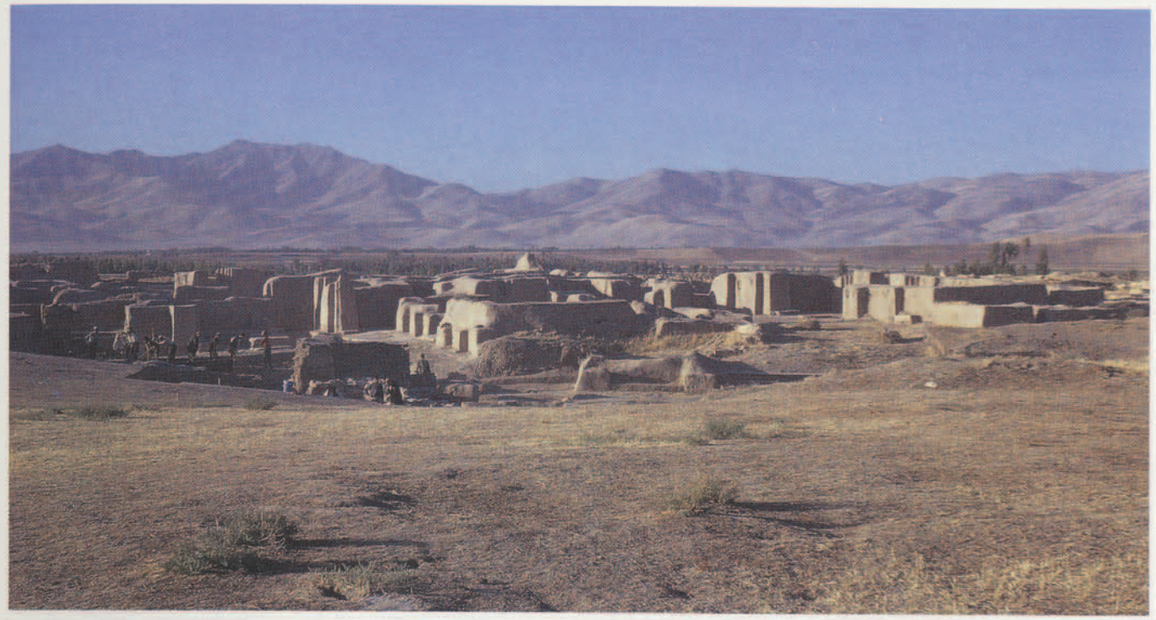
The Challenge of Interpretation

The preservation of so many artifacts in architectural contexts, and their abrupt burial as the result of the sudden collapse of the burning buildings, provides a unique opportunity for the study of a corpus of co-existing styles, artifact types, and methods of manufacture. The burned ruins of Hasanlu IVB provide the final resting place for these various objects; however, their points of origin in time and space, and their function remain as problems of interpretation that must be studied category by category and even object by object. This is a complex task, but one which can be undertaken by considering the geographical location of Hasanlu and adopting a model of analysis developed for similar sets of conditions in adjacent regions of Asia.

The syncretistic nature of the architecture and artifact assemblages at Hasanlu may be understood by recognizing its location on trade routes leading from the kingdom of Urartu to the north, from Assyria and Syria to the west, and from Mannea and Media to the southeast (Fig. 13). These trade routes (used also for military campaigns) facilitated the movement to Solduz of materials, objects, craftsmen, teachers, and officials from neighboring centers.

There is little reason to doubt the presence of foreigners at the site either as occasional visitors or as residents, a pattern already well documented for later periods at Pasargadae, Persepolis, Susa, and Babylon (Fig. 13). For example, ethnic groups that worked for the state and were present in Achaemenid cities included Cappadocians, Lydians, Carians and Ionians from Asia Minor, Sogdians and

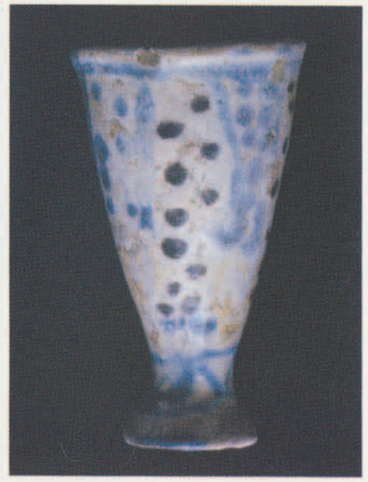
8
Air view in 1962, showing the northwest quadrant of the High Mound looking southwest. The site was excavated in a series of 10 m squares, separated by balks 1 m wide to preserve a record of the stratigraphy. Most of the visible features (lightly built structures to the right and pits to the left) are contemporary with the Urartian citadel or period IIIB; in the foreground, the more massive walls of a period IVB structure (Burned Building III) have just appeared.



9
General view of the excavated 9th century buildings in 1970. The photo was taken from the northeast corner of the High Mound, looking southwest. The smooth surface on the ancient brick walls is modern mud plaster, applied as in ancient times to protect the walls from weathering.

Bactrians from Central Asia, Babylonians, and Egyptians. Given its location in a border area, it seems likely that Urartians, Assyrians, Hurrians, Mannaeans, Medes, and others could have been present as individual craftsmen in a center like Hasanlu. The political role that such foreigners may have played is not known, since we lack written sources at the site. What we do know is that objects from as far away as Elam and Assyria reached Hasanlu during the Iron Age (Figs. 10, 12).

The model of cultural dynamics most likely to be useful for our purpose is one in which newcomers blend their own traditions with preexisting ones in an area. Groups in close proximity to more prestigious political and cultural entities have historically sought to increase their own prestige by adopting symbols, practices, and objects from these more powerful neighboring states (see Marcus, Pigott this volume). More specifically, political leaders in such new centers have consciously copied elements of architectural style in order to transfer visual symbols of power from established political centers to them-

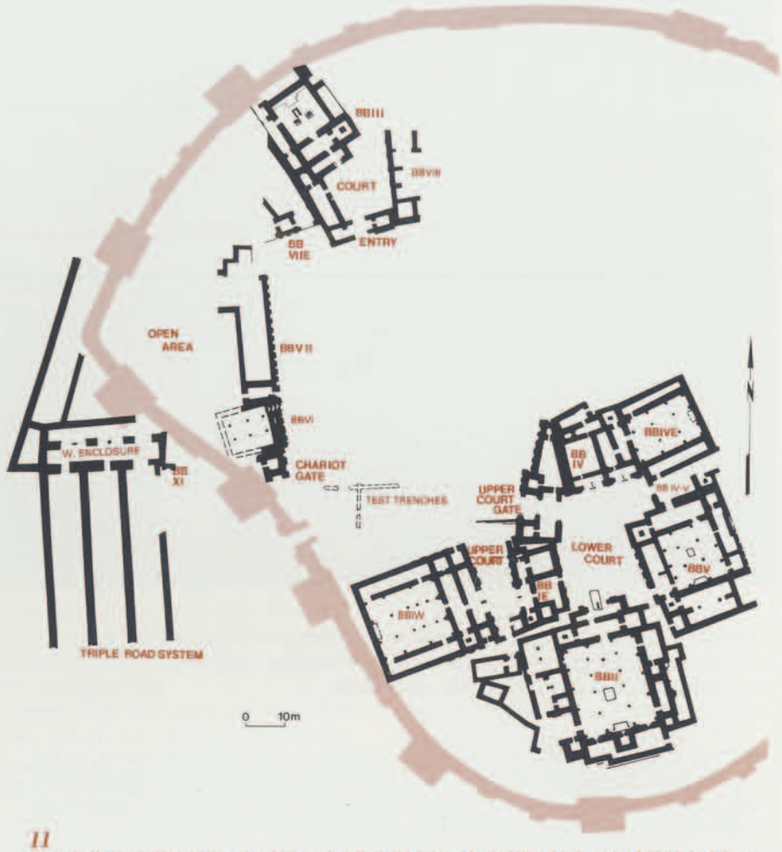


10a,b
Glazed artifacts from Hasanlu period IVB may be made in the Solduz area, but have strong parallels with objects from adjacent regions. The wall tile (a) is nearly identical to examples found in the palace of King Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) in Assyria. The glazed goblet is probably an Iranian product, with parallels in the northwestern Zagros as well as in Elam to the south. (HAS 70-360 [tile], Musée Iran Bastan, Tehran, W. 22.5 cm; HAS 64-114 [goblet], Musée Iran Bastan, Tehran, Ht. 13.3 cm)

selves, a practice amply documented by the actions of Assyrians, Elamites, and other rulers in ancient Mesopotamian and Iran (see Dyson, "Architecture," this issue).

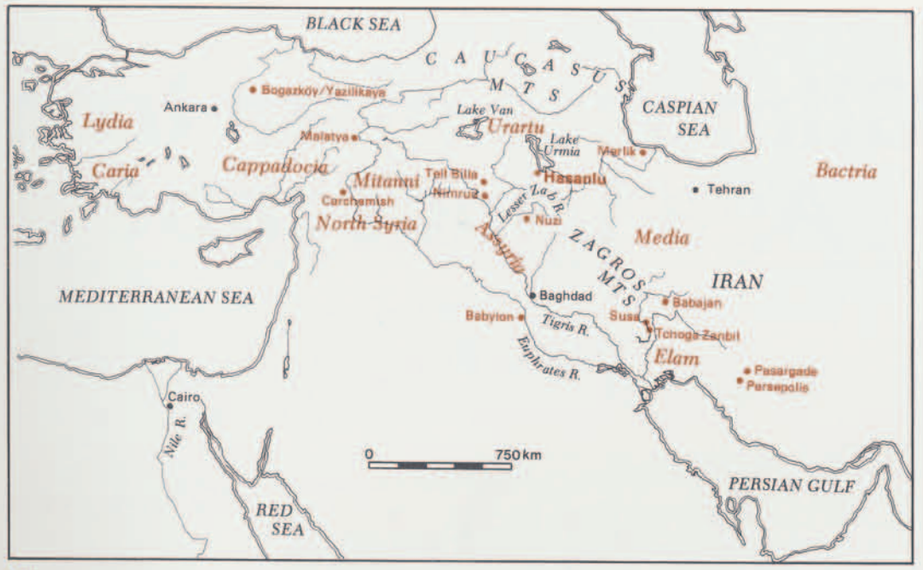
The work of Boris Marshack and V. I. Sarianidi at early historic sites in Bactria (Afghanistan and Central Asia) provides explicit examples of such a syncretistic process at work. Sarianidi's recent study of tomb contents from Tillya Tepe provides a set of categories that can be used for an analysis of artifacts at Hasanlu (see Sarianidi 1990). The Tillya necropolis dates to the end of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, preceding the Kushan Empire (1st century B.C. - 1st century A.D.). The objects found in this cemetery fall into the following categories, defined on the basis of origin: (1) imported objects from Parthia (Iran), India, China, Siberia, and the Roman Empire; (2) booty given to the conquering Yueh-chi Chinese overlords, which includes local jewelry and heirlooms; (3) locally made objects in styles derived from the classical Greek traditions of the Graeco-Bactrians; (4) objects with syncretic images, created through the combination of symbols and stylistic elements drawn from neighboring high cultures and pre-existing local traditions; and (5) objects in a purely local style derived from persisting Bronze Age traditions.

This same kind of mixture, reflecting multiple cultural sources, appears among the objects at Hasanlu: some objects are imported, some are local imitations, some are from earlier local traditions, some are syncretistic, and some are heirlooms. The full understanding of their cultural and historical significance requires a consideration of their ultimate origin, as well as an examination of their role in the community in which they were found. The articles that follow in this issue of *Expedition* address the problem of interpretation from varying points of view. The wealth of hidden information that is being teased out of this material forms the current process of rediscovering Hasanlu.



11
Plan of Hasanlu at the time of its destruction in 800 B.C. (period IVB). The later Urartian fortification wall (period IIIB) that was cut through the 9th century settlement is shown in brown.

12a-e (see opposite page)
These representations of people carved in ivory illustrate the stylistic diversity characteristic of Hasanlu period IVB (ca. 800 B.C.). (a) to (c) are almost certainly local products, while (d) is considered an import from North Syria, and (e) is a good example of Assyrian style. (a: UM 65-31-352, Ht. 7.1 cm; b: Metropolitan Museum of Art 65.163.23, Ht. 2.6 cm; c: Metropolitan Museum of Art 65.163.15, Ht. 2.5 cm; d: Metropolitan Museum of Art 65. 163.5, Ht. 4.8 cm; e: Metropolitan Museum of Art 65. 163.2-4, Ht. 9.2 cm)



13
Map showing the location of ethnic groups in the Near East during the early 1st millennium B.C.

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