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Some Thought on the Protohistoric Period in Dinkha Tepe, Iran

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Abstract

The site of Dinkha Tepe, situated in the central part of the Oshnaviyeh Plain, is one of the most interesting but still least studied sites in the Orumiyeh basin area. Dinkha Tepe, excavated stratigraphically in 1966 and 1968, bears evidence of a main phase of occupation ranging from the Middle Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age, and it is often linked to the better-known site of Hasanlu, suggesting that Dinkha Tepe was a centre belonging to its political sphere. The aims of the present paper are multiple. Firstly, we intend to provide evidence supporting the idea that the two sites should be instead considered as sort of independent "city-states"; secondly, we would like to propose a new interpretation on the relations among Dinkha Tepe and the Mesopotamian plains, and thirdly, we intend to suggest an unusual way of looking at the interactions of the site with the Urartian state.

Keywords: Dinkha Tepe, Protohistoric period, Middle Bronze Age, Iron Age, Urartu.

Article Type: Research Article

Introduction

One of the most interesting, and yet least studied, protohistoric sites in the Orumiyeh basin area is undoubtedly Dinkha Tepe. This tell, which was investigated cursorily in the second half of the 1960s, has yielded evidence of a main phase of occupation ranging from the Middle Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age. The excavations, albeit partial, together with related publications have both helped qualify Dinkha Tepe as a central site for the understanding of complex issues such as the political and economic relations between north-eastern Iran and the Mesopotamian plains. Dinkha Tepe is located in the central part of the Oshnaviyeh Plain, on the right bank of the Godar Çay, approximately 5.5 km southeast of the modern city of Oshnaviyeh (Figure. 1). The site, partially eroded by the course of the river, has a sub-elliptical shape with dimensions of approximately 370 m on the north-south axis by 390 m from the southeast to the northwest. Dinkha Tepe currently covers an area of 9.90 ha. However, we lack evidence for a settlement located at the foot of the site, which certainly existed but is no longer visible due both to the erosion of the Godar Çay and to intensive agricultural exploitation at the edges of the tell, which have also reduced its surface (Figures. 2-3).

Hasanlu, generally considered the largest site on the southern shore of Lake Orumiyeh (Dyson 1968: 83), measures 19 ha in total, if the tell elevation and surrounding areas are taken into account. Nonetheless, in order to compare the two sites realistically, only the size of the actual tell needs to be considered. From here, it can be seen that the

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anthropogenic hill of Dinkha, with its almost 10 ha, is larger than the Hasanlu one, its tell covering an area of approximately 6.5 ha. At this point, it is necessary to re-evaluate certain information provided in the past, such as the proposal, promoted by Muscarella[1] , suggesting that Dinkha was a centre belonging to Hasanlu's political sphere of influence: in fact, reasoning on the basis of dimensional criteria and given the data presented, it is not possible to exclude an opposite situation. Here we prefer to hypothesize, also on the basis of the data that will be presented, that, for both the Middle Bronze and Iron Age, these primary sites in the Oshnaviyeh and Solduz plains functioned as a "city-state", forming autonomous but interdependent centres, each with its own satellite sites. This paper sets out to discuss some of these aspects diachronically, and also to propose some alternative interpretations to what has been written so far, especially about the Middle Bronze Age levels of Dinkha IV and the Early Iron Age level of Dinkha II.



Figure. 1: *Satellite view of the Dinkha Tepe site and the course of the Godar Çay.*
(After: Google Earth)

History of Research

Dinkha Tepe is a Bronze and Iron Age site situated in Azerbaijan, in the Oshnaviyeh valley, southwest of Lake Orumiyeh, and less than 25 km west of the Hasanlu site.

The site was firstly excavated by Sir Mark Aurel Stein (Stein 1940: 367-376) in 1936, who focused his research on the northern slopes of the mound,

[1] *"The strong cultural connections demonstrated to exist between Hasanlu and Dinkha over such a long period of time suggest an hypothesis: that both the Solduz and Ushnu valleys were part of the same ancient state, of which Hasanlu may have been the major city, with Dinkha one of several provincial towns (there are still several unexcavated large mounds in Solduz) governed by a prince or governor"* (Muscarella 1974: 81).

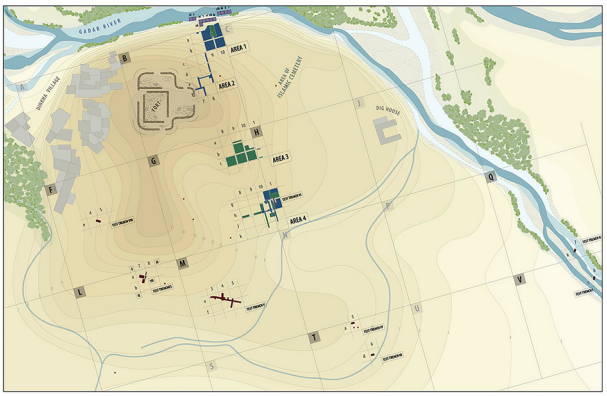


Figure. 2: *Topographical plan of Dinkha Tepe with indication of the excavation areas*
(After: https://scholar.harvard.edu/pizzorno/dinkha).



Figure. 3: *View of the tell from the north, with the part eroded by the action of the Godar Çay.*

discovering material dated to the Bronze Age only. Further surface surveys, combined with the evidence collected in Stein's soundings, indicated that Dinkha Tepe was a large settlement predominantly dating back to the Hasanlu period VI (Hamlin 1974: 125). Thirty years later, in 1966 and, again, in 1968, an American team directed by Robert J. Dyson Jr. and Oscar White Muscarella excavated the Dinkha mound as part of regional research connected with the Hasanlu project (Figures. 4-6).

These excavations revealed Islamic remains (Dinkha I) and a cemetery below them, on the north side; the burial sites (Dinkha II and III) contained cultural material similar to that of Hasanlu periods IV and V (Muscarella, 1968; Muscarella 1974; Muscarella 1988: 15-19, 80). By the end of the 1968 season, excavations reached the virgin soil on the northern slope: the stratigraphy revealed a sequence of occupation marked by architecture,

a few intact stone tombs, and a collection of faunal, floral, charcoal, and artifactual remains (Hamlin 1974: 125). Directly below the Iron Age cemetery, Bronze Age architecture and burials were recovered (Dinkha IV), the study of which revealed close parallels in those of the Bronze Age culture of Hasanlu VI (18th-15th centuries BCE). Except for the pottery (Muscarella 1968; Hamlin 1974), most of the findings from this period have not been published. The Bronze Age remains consisted of a massive fortification wall over which a later settlement had been built; other Bronze Age architectural remains included two stone tombs containing multiple burials. The presence at Dinkha, but not at Hasanlu, of polychrome pottery related to that found both in Haftavan Tepe, eastern Turkey and in the South Caucasus remains to be investigated (Edwards 1986).



Figure. 4: *View from the east of two of the excavation areas, 3 and 4.*



Figure. 5: *View of the current state of the ancient excavations.*



Figure. 6: *View of the northern area of the site, with the illegal excavations in the foreground and the Godar Çay on the left.*

The Role of Dinkha Tepe and its Relations with Mesopotamia

Dinkha Tepe proves to be a key site in the Orumiyeh region for a number of reasons, including the fact that the settlement is part of the dynamics of medium- and long-range connections with northern Mesopotamia and, more generally, with the areas west of the Zagros mountain range (Figure. 7).



Figure. 7: *View of Dinkha Tepe from the north, with the Zagros mountain range in the background.*

A number of scholars have addressed this issue, and certainly, with the extensive publication of all the data from excavations, more information remains to be added to this complex picture. Probably, the most relevant protohistorical phase in terms of connections is represented by Dinkha IV, the layers referring to the Middle Bronze Age levels. These have yielded both relevant structural elements, including a probable fortification wall and a burial ground, among the very few known for this period in the Orumiyeh basin area. One of the most significant links with the eastern Zagros is probably the presence of so-called Khabur Ware: this ceramic class was first defined by M.E.L. Mallowan, who excavated several sites in the area of the Khabur River, in northwestern Syria, between

the 1930s and 1940s, including Tall Chagar Bazar, where an abundant quantity of this pottery was found (Mallowan 1936: 1-86; Mallowan 1937: 91-177; Mallowan 1947: 1-259). Although this ceramic tradition is associated with Assyria, it also has a notably wider geographical distribution, having also been found in strategically important sites of southern Anatolia, such as Kültepe / Kanesh, the Palaeo-Assyrian *kārum*. The presence of Khabur Ware in Dinkha bears witness to long-range connections, although this aspect opens up a number of problems: in fact, analyses based on the determination of the clay on the same ceramic class from the Hasanlu site have demonstrated that the vessels were produced locally. This type of analysis is lacking for the Dinkha vessels, but by extension one can assume that these vessels were either imported or produced by communities of foreign potters working at the site. These aspects shall be investigated in specific studies in the future. As already mentioned, Khabur Ware was spread over a wide area for a long period of time, starting late in the 3rd millennium and covering almost the entire 2nd millennium: a complex period, due to the succession in northern Mesopotamia of different political entities. The subject cannot be dealt with specifically here, as is has also been the subject of comprehensive reviews and analyses (Hamlin 1971; Hamlin 1974; Oguchi 1977; Kramer 1977), but Khabur Ware is generally associated with the reign of Šamši-Adad and subsequent rulers. As for the presence of Khabur Ware in the Orumiyeh area, these productions have been identified in a few sites, all significantly located in the southwestern portion of the lake, an area probably more easily connected with Mesopotamia via the mountain passes of the Zagros range. Among the sites, in addition to Dinkha Tepe, there are also contexts such as Gond-e-Vila, Tappeh Nalus 1, Tappeh Nalivan, Tappeh Hasanlu, Kukela, Mohammad Šah Tepe, Mahabad Tepe (Cesaretti and Dan in press). This demonstrates a fairly consistent penetration in the area and several receiving sites that were not limited to a single sorting centre. For their part, the sites of Dinkha Tepe and Hasanlu Tepe could be considered among the main 2nd millennium sites for the Oshnaviyeh and Solduz plain. Further evidence of exchange and contact comes from some materials of "exotic" reminiscence found in Dinkha Tepe, in the tomb B10a B27, a context studied and published in detail by K. Rubinson (Rubinson 1991: 373-394; Rubinson 1994: 199-203). As Rubinson has shown, the materials, especially the gold and silver objects, are of local production but also have parallels spread over a much wider area, testifying to a circulation of ideas that must have been common to a vast territory. Another important aspect is the probable presence of *sikkatu* and a Mesopotamian *bulla* with a seal referable to the Ur III phase, although these materials have not been published in specific contributions (Rubinson 1991:389).

As pointed out in the theses of both Kramer (Kramer 1977) and Rubinson, the situation is currently too complex to define with certainty the role of Dinkha Tepe in the circulation of goods, raw materials and ideas that followed an east-west, but also west-east, direction. In the present state of knowledge many aspects remain open, unsolved problems increasing the site's interest. Probably the thesis most favored by the two scholars is that Dinkha Tepe cannot be entirely considered as a Palaeo-Assyrian *kārum* of the same type as Kültepe, due to a total lack of textual and archaeological evidence for a mass presence of Mesopotamian components east of the Zagros. However, it should be emphasized that only a small portion of the site has been investigated in detail; it is not excluded that further elements may come to light if investigations resume. Also interesting is Kramer's suggestion, interpreting Dinkha Tepe in relation to long-distance trade, possibly centred around the commerce of tin (Hamlin 1971: 306-308; Hamlin 1974: 132). The thesis is plausible and interesting; however, it needs to be substantiated by more archaeological discoveries, as regards the tin trade ingots or other related materials, for example.

Some Reflections on Dinkha Tepe in the Iron Age (Dinkha II) and the Urartian Advance in to the Region

Little is known about the Early Iron Age at Dinkha (Iron II, Dinkha II), a circumstance traceable to the limited archaeological excavations conducted on the site. Regarding the Late Bronze Age (Dinkha III) and Iron Age (Dinkha II) layers, however, a specific article has been published by Oscar White Muscarella (Muscarella 1974). Dinkha II is characterised by the presence of seventy-two graves and limited architectural remains, located mainly in two areas of the mound, the cemetery area and squares G9a-c (Figure. 8) (Muscarella 1974: 35, 54). The scholar underlines how some

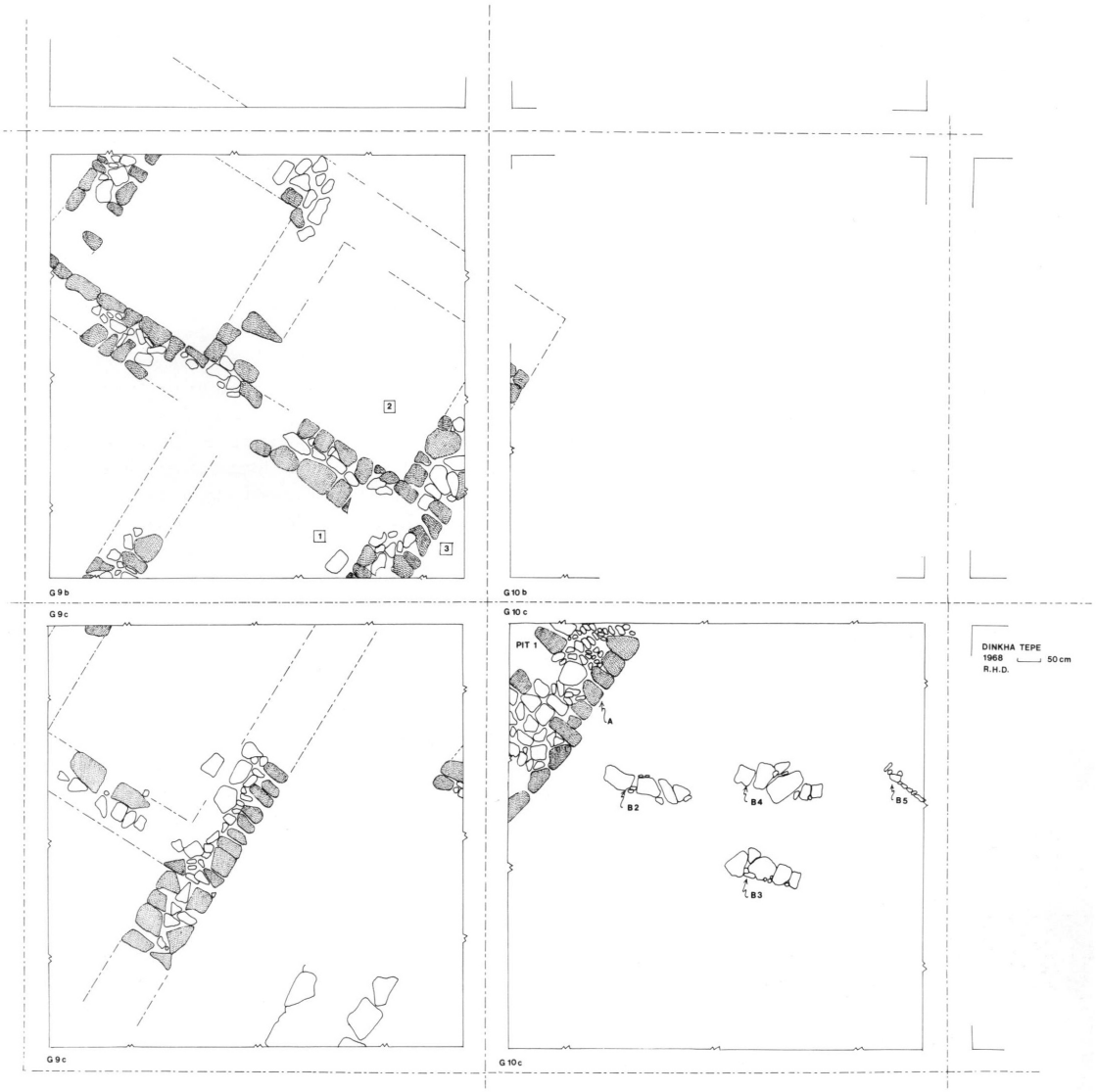


Figure. 8: *Plan of the Iron Age structures in areas G9a-C (After: Muscarella 1974: Figure. 24).*

tombs were located above some Iron II structures, making it possible to divide the phase Dinkha II into two sub-phases (Muscarella 1974: 55). It cannot be excluded, however, that these tombs were later, chronologically inserted in the Iron III phase, testifying to the continuity of cultural traditions with the previous phases. In some passages, Muscarella stresses that the housing structures, defined in some passages as part of a "town" had been abandoned (Muscarella 1974: 55-56, 82), a phenomenon certainly attributable to the lack of unequivocal evidence of destruction. Materials and architecture clearly point to the total similarity between the contexts of Hasanlu IV and Dinkha II, to the point of suggesting to the scholar that *"The strong cultural connections demonstrated to exist between Hasanlu and Dinkha over such a long period of time suggest an hypothesis: that both the Solduz and Ushnu valleys were part of the same ancient state, of which Hasanlu may have been the major city, with Dinkha one of several provincial towns (there are still several unexcavated large mounds in Solduz) governed by a prince or governor. It is also possible that the same language was spoken at both sites. To be sure, we know nothing about ancient place names or languages in the area and therefore can go no further than hypothesizing. But with respect to the material evidence of the two valleys in the Iron Age, they must be treated as one cultural region"* (Muscarella 1974: 81). The destruction of Hasanlu IV and the abandonment of Dinkha are connected by Muscarella to the Urartian entrance in

the plain of Oshnaviyeh and Solduz, in the era of the so-called co-regency between King Išpuini and his son Minua (late 9th century BCE) (see CTU A 3-10), as would be proved by the construction of the Qalatgah fortress: "*Surely, these two events, the end of the Iron II culture and the entry of the Urartians into the area are related: the Urartian invasion of the west and south of the lake is the historical event that aborted the flourishing Iron II culture*" (Muscarella 1974: 82). These interesting ideas give rise to some pertinent reflections. The contemporaneity of Hasanlu and Dinkha in the Iron Age, and also the sharing of a common destiny connected to the arrival of the Urartians in the area (see Khanmohammadi *et al*. Forthcoming b), could help shed light on an important Urartian inscription, providing new toponymic insights. The stele of Karagündüz (CTU A 3-9), also from the co-regency of Išpuini and Minua, found in Turkey, near Lake Erçek in the Van area, provides important information for the area's historical geography:

"For the god Ḫaldi, his (or, resp. the) Lord, Išpuini, son of Sarduri, and Minua, son of Išpuini erected this stele. Ḫaldi set off with his weapon, he defeated the city Mešta, he defeated the territory of the land Paršua. Behind(?) the god Ḫaldi, behind(?) the weapon of the god Ḫaldi through the protection of the god Ḫaldi Išpuini, son of Sarduri, and Minua, son of Išpuini, set off towards the city Mešta. Among the troops behind(?) Išpuini, behind(?) there were 106 chariots, 9174 (or 9274) horsemen, [x tens of thousand +]2704 foot soldiers. The god Ḫaldi marched before Išpuini, son of Sarduri, and Minua, son of Išpuini. They conquered the city Mešta, the city Qua, the city Šaritu, the city Nigibi, and the territory of the land Paršua (or: of/in the territory of Paršua). From there came [x thou]sand 483 mules(?), [x thou]sand 160 alive men, [x tens of thou]sand + 6600 women and children, 1120 horses, [x] tens of thousand + 2000 oxen, 365 camels, [x] tens of thousand + 5000 sheep. Through the protection of the god Ḫaldi Išpuini, son of Sarduri, and Minua, son of Išpuini, carried away these things apart from what the troops plundered when I withdraw(?) from the fortresses (…)"[1] .

The most important passage relates to the conquest of the cities of Mešta, Qua, Šaritu and Nigibi and the mention of the territory of the land Paršua (see Dan 2020: 62, 152, 154, 159, 165). On the toponym Mešta there has been considerable discussion about the attribution between Hasanlu and other sites on the southern shore of Lake Orumiyeh (see Dan 2020: 152; Khanmohammadi *et al*. Forthcoming b); beyond doubt, however is that the toponym was located in this area, due to the discovery of another Urartian inscription in situ, from the time of Minua, near Taštepe (CTU A 5-10):

"[Through the protection] of the god Ḫaldi Minua, son of Išpu[ini], created this fortress [in the land(?)] of the city Mešta. Furthermore, he conquered [the territory of] the land Ma[na], he settled there [garrisons], he settled infantry [and cavalry(?)]. [The god Ḫaldi] marched (ahead). Minua [says]: I [conquered] the land] Mana. Furthermore I se[t up there] a stele of the god Ḫaldi. Through the greatness of the god Ḫaldi (I am) [Mi] nua, strong [king], [lor]d of Ṭušpa-City. Minua says: (As for the one) who [dama]ges this [inscription], (as for the one) wh[o makes] anyone else do [these things], may [the god Ḫaldi, the Weather-God], and the [Sun]-god anni[hilate] him under [the sun] . . . (rest untranslatable)"[2] .

Therefore, regardless of which archaeological site was to be mentioned with Mešta, Tappeh Hasanlu remains, at the current state of research, the most credible. That said, the positioning of the other toponyms also needs to be discussed. The position of Qua, Šaritu and Nigibi depends on the translation of the context in which the toponym Paršua appears, and the relation between the land and its cities. The translation could be "and the land of Paršua" or "of the land of Paršua" (Diakonoff - Kashkai 1981: 60). We do not even know if the order of the toponyms of the cities followed a geographical criterion or were a ranking of the sites' importance of. However, Mešta, in the Taštepe inscription, was not connected in any way to Paršua, so the other cities were probably independent political entities and had nothing nothing to do with the enigmatic mention of the political entity defined as Paršua. At this point it is possible to postulate a location of these cities in the Oshnaviyeh and Solduz area, and Dinkha Tepe, in its phase II, must be considered as a strong candidate for one of the toponyms mentioned in the epigraph. This is due to the presence, at Dinkha Tepe, of Early Iron Age architecture and materials coeval with Hasanlu IV, and also to its importance

[1]The English translation of CTU A 3-9 is available at http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ecut/pager/.

[2]The English translation of CTU A 5-10 is available at http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/ecut/pager/.

as an arrival point of the trade route coming from Mesopotamia. It is also necessary to take into account the positioning of the tell, on the course of the Godar Çay river, exactly in axis with the road crossing the valley carved by the Qasemlu Çay, that was and still is the main route connecting the plains Orumiyeh and Oshnaviyeh plains. Dinkha Tepe and the surrounding territories, formerly controlled by the site, were located right along the road linking up with the Solduz plain: it is therefore possible to hypothesize that Dinkha was abandoned at the same time as, if not immediately before, the destruction of Hasanlu. Dinkha Tepe should therefore be considered as one of the candidates for the attribution of these toponyms (Qua, Šaritu and Nigibi), together with other important sites in the area, such as Tappeh Naqadeh (Salvini 1984: 20). The presence of tombs set on the levels of abandonment of the Dinkha Iron Age structures could be placed chronologically when the area was under Urartian control. There would therefore be evidence of a strong continuity, in the Urartian period, of traditions and local material culture. This is highly probable if we take into account now well-known aspects the state of Urartu's interaction with local communities. Above all, these territories were never formally under Urartian control, as the last Urartian outpost is to be considered Qalatgah: rather, they constituted a buffer zone between Urartu and Mannea (Khanmohammadi *et al.* Forthcoming b). Urartian interest in the plains of Oshnaviyeh and Solduz, at least pre-7th century BCE, seems to have been aimed, on the one hand, at keeping the road to Muṣaṣir open and protected (Khanmohammadi *et al.* Forthcoming a), as it passed through the Oshnaviyeh plain and climbed the mountains, and, on the other hand, at raiding the Mannaean land. The construction of Qalatgah in this regard served the dual purpose of, first, controlling these routes and providing a blockade to access the road to the Orumiyeh plain, and, second, as a bridgehead for military expeditions to the south. After the 8th campaign of Sargon II, in 714 BCE, and the consequent Urartian retraction from the area, we know of fitful attempts to re-occupy the area, then perhaps a more long-lasting one in Tappeh Hasanlu by Rusa (II), son of Argišti (Khanmohammadi *et al*. Forthcoming b): At that point in time, however, Dinkha Tepe's role in the political scenario of lake's Orumiyeh southern shore ended a century before.

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