

Abstract

Hâjîâbâd and the dialogue of civilizations

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Excavations at an extensively damaged site near Hâjîâbâd, a large village to the southwest of Dârâb, east of Shîrâz, Iran, revealed numerous stucco works of outstanding quality. These, together with murals, were part of the decoration of a mansion, subsequently called the Manor House.

The Manor House of Hâjîâbâd was most probably built around the 360s AD, during the reign of Shâhpur II (AD 309-379). This was a time of extreme animosity between Iran and the Roman Empire under Constantine the Great and several of his successors, Constance II (AD 317-361) and Julian the apostate (AD 331-363) in particular.

Iconographical studies of some of the stuccos of Hâjîâbâd, nevertheless, show that in spite of this situation, cultural contacts between the two great civilizations of the ancient world, the Iranian and Roman, never stopped. At least two of the figurative stuccos of Hâjîâbâd, a statuette of a nude female personage and that of a nude child, were almost certainly made under eastern Mediterranean religious and artistic influence.

This situation is similar to that of the time of Shâpûr I (AD 242-271) and demonstrates an almost constant cultural interaction between the two empires. If this influence can be seen in the material culture of the Iranian side, it should almost certainly be detectable on the other side as well. So far, nonetheless, western scholars have shown limited interest in studying Iranian cultural influence on western cultures. I sincerely hope that this enthusiasm for detecting the past cultural exchanges will find its counterbalances in this country as well.