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IRANIAN ARCHEOLOGY: AN OVERVIEW

by Helene J. Kantor

In Iran during the first part of November the birthday of His Majesty, the Shah, is celebrated by many special events. For example, the Ministry of Culture and Art organizes concerts, theatrical presentations, and special exhibitions. One department of the Ministry, the Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research, has, under its Director Dr. Firouz Bagherzadeh, established an annual symposium in Teheran at which archeologists working in Iran present to each other the results of their work in the preceding season. The Symposium is intended to provide a forum for the rapid exchange of information about recent developments and for the discussion, both formal and informal, of matters of mutual archeological interest.

This year the Fourth Annual Symposium took place between November 3rd and 8th; I attended as a special guest of the Ministry of Culture and Art. Though the flight to Teheran took some eighteen hours, it did not lessen the suddenness of the change from the university campus to the traffic-clogged streets of Teheran, even more crowded than last spring. Because of structural alterations in the buildings of the Iranian Archaeological Museum, the Symposium was held across the street in the quarters of the Organization for Social Service. That building, surrounded by lawns and flower-beds still filled with roses and dahlias, was a quiet refuge from the teeming streets.

The Symposium was opened in the presence of His Excellency, Mr. Mehrdad Pahlbod, Minister of Culture and Art, by the welcoming address of Dr. Bagherzadeh in which he summarized briefly the archeological activities in Iran during 1974-1975. In the regular sessions the reports were scheduled as far as possible in chronological order, from the earliest to the latest. The first session, which I chaired, included papers dealing with paleolithic and neolithic periods. That day was a busy one for me as my report on the ninth season of the excavations by Professor P. P. Delougaz and myself at Chogha Mish came in the afternoon.

The Elamite cup found at the end of our last season (Annual Report, p. 20) had been selected, as the major object from Iran in 1974-75, to appear on the poster of the Symposium. Dr. Bagherzadeh told me that he and his colleagues devoted much thought to the poster: feeling that color would be inappropriate, they chose a black background in memory of Professor Delougaz. The Chogha Mish cup was the central object in the special exhibition set up for the Symposium, standing by itself in a well-lighted case. Another of the objects from Chogha Mish, a small bone figure of a woman dating to the Protoliterate Period (Report, p. 23), was reproduced as a gift for Her Majesty, Queen Farah, who is well-known for her interest in cultural matters. She came on the second day of the Symposium to open the special exhibition. The participants were introduced to her; afterwards those of us with objects in the exhibition were asked to stand by our cases in order to explain the contents to her. In the exhibition hall she went systematically from case to case, asking questions about the individual objects.

The papers presented in English, French, and German during the five working days of the Symposium covered three categories of work—the yearly excavations of the continuing permanent expeditions, the surveys, and the restoration of standing monuments. For example, among the regular excavations of early-period sites in Khuzestan, in addition to that the Joint Iranian Expedition, there are those of the Délégation archéologique française en Iran at Susa (reported on by its director Jean Perrot and by a paper sent by Prof. Elizabeth Carter) and of the University of Teheran at nearby Haft Tepe (reported on by Professor E. O. Negahban). To the southeast of Khuzestan, in Fars province, where Persepolis also lies, is the site of Malyan. There a pioneering excavation of Ohio State University and the University Museum in Philadelphia, reported on by Professor W. Sumner, has identified the long-sought city of Anshan, one of the Elamite capitals, and is uncovering public buildings with painted decoration, tablets, and seal impressions showing the settlement's importance in the third millennium B.C.

JAN 30 1976

2 Two sites in the little-known eastern provinces of Iran, Tepe Yahya in Kerman, reported on by Professor C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky of Harvard, and Shahr-e Sukhte, reported on by Professor M. Tosi of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, were in the third millennium B.C. important centers involved in a network of relationships with Turkestan in the north, Afghanistan in the east, and Mesopotamia far to the west.

Another of the continuing excavations is that of the University of Teheran in the central plateau at Sagzabad near Qazvin organized by Professor Negahban who, as many of you know, has many close bonds with Chicago, since he studied in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and has long been a good friend. He has restored a large and beautiful Safavid caravanserai to serve as the field center for the Archaeological Institute of the University of Teheran and for the training in excavation required of all undergraduates in the University's Archaeological Department. He reported on the excavations in progress of three sites at Sagzabad. At Zagheh, the earliest of these, upper walls and the door lintel of a building dating to the early fifth millennium B.C. had been discovered a fortnight before the Symposium began. Even more exciting than the excellent preservation of the room are the geometric designs in black and white paint on a red background on the upper parts of two walls. These are the first prehistoric wall paintings to be found in Iran and suggest a special, perhaps cultic, character for the building. I used the Friday on which no formal meetings were held to go to visit Professor Negahban and his students at the excavations and the caravanserai. The lower walls of the painted building had not yet been excavated when I left Iran; the expectation was that additional painting would be found there.

Iran today is a very rapidly developing country; large-scale industrialization and farming unfortunately bring grave threats to the archeological remains so that the need to find and protect as many ancient sites as possible is acute. At the Symposium blanks on the map were filled by a number of reports on surveys, including those of Dr. S. Ganjavi (Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research) in Khuzestan, Prof. P. Mortensen (University of Aarhus, Denmark) in Luristan, Dr. L. Levine (Royal Ontario Museum) in Kermanshah, and Prof. H. Nissen (Free University, Berlin) and his student, A. Zagarell, in the Bakhtiari mountains over 200 kilometers east of Chogha Mish. Professor Nissen, in addition, dug a sounding at one of the Bakhtiari mountain sites which yielded ceramics of a new type. He thought it might parallel some of our Archaic Susiana pottery from Chogha Mish; when we looked at some of his sherds there was a family resemblance in the type of ware, but hardly any in the painted decoration. Apparently the Bakhtiari mountain sherds document a hitherto unknown cultural phase. Its emergence shows how much is still to be discovered in the many mountain valleys and highland plains of Iran.

Among the reports dealing with later periods were two on Urtian sites of the early first millennium B.C. in western Iran, Prof. C. Burney's (University of Manchester) on Haftvan Tepe and Dr. W. Kleiss' (Deutsche Archäologische Institut, Teheran) on Bastam. Prof. L. Vanden Berghe (University of Ghent) reported on his excavation of a cemetery of the early first millennium B.C. at Chamahzi-Mumah in Luristan. For years controversies have been raging concerning the date and character of the Luristan bronzes appearing in antiquities markets without any archeological context. Now many of the problems of the cultural development of Luristan from the third to the first millennium B.C. are being solved by Professor Vanden Berghe's yearly campaigns. The impeccable plans and records of his work are all the more impressive when one remembers that he and his staff must usually trek by mule into remote valleys and set up camp in tents.

The overall view of recent archeological work in Iran was rounded off by reports on sites of still later date, which included those of Mr. A. A. Kargar Sarfaraz (Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research) on Sasanian reliefs near Bishapur in Fars, Dr. E. Keall (Royal Ontario Museum) on the Parthian fortress of Qaleh Yazdgerd, Prof. R. Naumann (Deutsche Archäologische Institut, Istanbul) on the Parthian and Islamic mountain site of Takht-i Sulaiman in Azarbaijan, and Dr. M. Y. Kiani (Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research) on Islamic sites in the Gurgan plain near the southeastern corner of the Caspian sea.

After the close of the Symposium I remained in Teheran for a few days to arrange for the new season of work at Chogha Mish with Dr. Bagherzadeh. It hardly needs to be said that in returning to Iran for the Symposium and in preparing for the renewal of work at Chogha Mish the absence of Professor P. P. Delougaz is a constantly and deeply felt loss. The return to the expedition house which he planned and to the mound whose excavation was begun by his initiative will be sad. It was his desire, though, that the work should continue even if he himself were not there, so it is in this spirit that the plans are being made and the many problems caused by his absence are being, as much as possible, solved. Already last March he and I were discussing where it would be important to dig in the coming season.

The schedule now calls for the staff to assemble in camp at the end of December. I hope to be able to report in January about the renewal of the Expedition's work, both in camp, where much important material still remains for study, and on the mound itself. In the meantime, this first newsletter of the Joint Iranian Expedition's 1975-76 season brings to you best wishes for the New Year.

Mr. Donald S. Whitcomb, Ph.D. candidate, will teach a Members' Course in Iranian Archeology, with emphasis on the museum collection, during the spring of 1976. Classes will be held Tuesday mornings and evenings—participants may come to either or both sessions—from 10:00 to 11:30 and 5:30 to 7:00, beginning April 13th. The fee is \$30.00 (\$45.00 for non-members); please call Mrs. Jill Maher, 753-2573 or 753-2471, for information or registration.



THE MEDIEVAL HISTORY OF THE CASPIAN LITTORAL IN YEMENITE MANUSCRIPTS by Wilferd Madelung

The coastal area south of the Caspian Sea and the Yemen, separated by more than 2,000 miles of largely desert land, were connected for many centuries of medieval Islam by close religious, intellectual, and political ties. Both regions, protected by forbidding mountain ranges against military intrusions, tended to elude the control of outside powers and offered ideal shelter to any rebel against the universal authority of the Caliphate. Thus it is not surprising that both became centers of activity of the Zaydis, a Shiite sectarian movement whose political activism rendered its survival precarious in more exposed localities. The Zaydis held that the Imamate, the supreme leadership of the Muslim community, legitimately belonged to any descendant of the Prophet Mohammed's cousin Ali and his daughter Fatima who was both qualified by a high degree of religious learning and willing to claim his title to the leadership in armed revolt against the Caliphs.

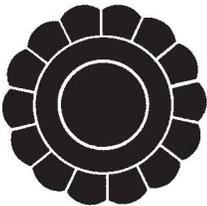
The Zaydi movement originated in Kufa, near modern Najaf in Iraq, in a rebellion in favor of a great-grandson of Ali in 740 A.D. and during the following century supported a large number of abortive insurrections. A first lasting success was achieved only in 864 when the native population of western Tabaristan (modern Mazandaran on the Caspian littoral), rising against the oppressive rule of the caliphal governors, invited a Zaydi descendant of Ali, al-Hasan ibn Zayd, to lead their revolt. Al-Hasan ibn Zayd became the founder of an independent Zaydi state in Tabaristan with its capital in Amol. This Zaydi state was definitively overthrown in 928 when Tabaristan reverted to Sunnite rule. Through the activity of the Alid rulers of Tabaristan, however, the peoples of the coastal plains and the mountains west of Tabaristan, known from antiquity as the Daylamites and the Giltes, had been converted to the Zaydi form of Islam. They quickly restored a Zaydi state, ruled by descendants of Ali and Fatima, in their own territories. Though strictly a local power, the tiny Zaydi commonwealth survived for over six centuries. Its capital was in early times usually in Hawsam, modern Rudisar, and later in Lahijan, today the largest city in eastern Gilan. In 1526 the Zaydi ruler of Lahijan formally announced to the Safavid Shah Tahmasp his conversion to Twelver Shiism, which had become the official religion of Persia. His subjects followed suit, and Zaydi Shiism became extinct in the Caspian provinces.

4 The history of the Caspian Zaydi community and its Alid rulers would be largely forgotten were it not for the fact that Zaydism found another foothold in the Yemen where it has survived to the present. The Zaydi state in the Yemen was founded, four decades after that in Tabaristan, by the Alid al-Hadi ila l-Haqq (d. 911). Al-Hadi had first visited Tabaristan in the hope of establishing himself there and later in the Yemen was supported by Zaydi volunteers from the Caspian region.

The relations between the two Zaydi communities were not always free from friction and rivalry. Theoretically, there could be only one Imam entitled to the supreme rule of the Muslim community at any one time, yet the two communities usually obeyed different Alid rulers. Moreover, a large section of the Caspian community adopted a different system of religious law and ritual from the Yemenites, and there were some points of conflict in theological doctrine. Serious efforts to overcome these differences were made in the 12th century. In 1117 the Yemenites for the first time recognized an Alid ruler residing in the Caspian area as their Imam. In order to bring the Yemenites into doctrinal conformity with the Caspian community, the Imam sent a Caspian scholar and judge to the Yemen with his library, which was said—probably with some exaggeration—to contain 12,000 volumes. The efforts at achieving doctrinal unity continued throughout the century, with Persian Zaydi scholars coming to teach in the Yemen and Yemenite scholars studying in the centers of Zaydi learning in northern Iran. At the beginning of the 13th century the Caspian Zaydi community in turn recognized the Yemenite Imam al-Masur Abd Allah ibn Hamza. It was during the 12th and early 13th centuries that the bulk of the extensive Caspian Zaydi literature, including works on theology, law, Koran exegesis, mysticism, and biography, came to be transferred to the Yemen where much of it continued to be transmitted after the extinction of the Caspian community.

Historical information about the Caspian Zaydi community is scattered in the Yemenite Zaydi manuscripts. Sizeable collections of Yemenite manuscripts, still partially uncatalogued, have been preserved since the 19th century in the libraries of the British Museum, Berlin, Munich, Vienna, and Milan. Valuable new source material has come to light in the manuscripts filmed in the Yemen by the Egyptian National Library in recent decades. The major texts, consisting mostly of biographies of the Imams, extracts from chronicles, and a lengthy letter by a Zaydi scholar of Lahijan to a colleague in the Yemen describing the declining fortunes of the Caspian community in the 13th century, have been gathered by me and prepared for edition. It is hoped that their publication will contribute to rescue from oblivion the story of a religious community which for many centuries successfully struggled to maintain its identity in a hostile environment until its absorption into the emerging Persian national state.

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