

EXCAVATIONS AT CHOGHA MISH IN IRAN

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The third season of excavations at Chogha Mish in Khuzestan lasted from November 5, 1965, to April 5, 1966. In addition to Professor Helene J. Kantor and the writer, both of whom had spent two previous seasons of excavations at the site (November-



General view of the excavations looking north. In the foreground a worker is sorting sherds from the trench which can be seen above his head. In the background are the excavations on the higher mounds.

December, 1961, and February–June, 1963), the staff consisted of two of our graduate students, Father Stanislaw Loffreda and Miss Elizabeth Carter. Messrs. Manucher Imani and Rahbar Omadi served as commissioners on behalf of the Service of Antiquities of the Iranian government. In February, to make up for the departure of Miss Carter and Father Loffreda, we were fortunate to secure the participation of two experienced and highly devoted archeologists, Mrs. H. A. Frankfort from England and Miss Ruth Vaadia from Israel. The number of local laborers varied from about twenty-five to well over a hundred. Nearly all the men who had worked for us in the past asked to be employed again. The fact that we succeeded in training some of the men to recognize and to trace mud-brick walls and a few boys to sort and mend pottery was an important factor in the great amount of work that we were able to accomplish during the past season.

The site of Chogha Mish is a noticeable landmark from a considerable stretch of the Dezful–Shushtar road. It is one of the largest sites in the region and an outpost in the Susiana plain toward the mountains. The nearest foothills begin only some ten miles away, and on clear days four mountain ranges, one towering beyond and above another, can be seen, with the tallest showing snow even in July.

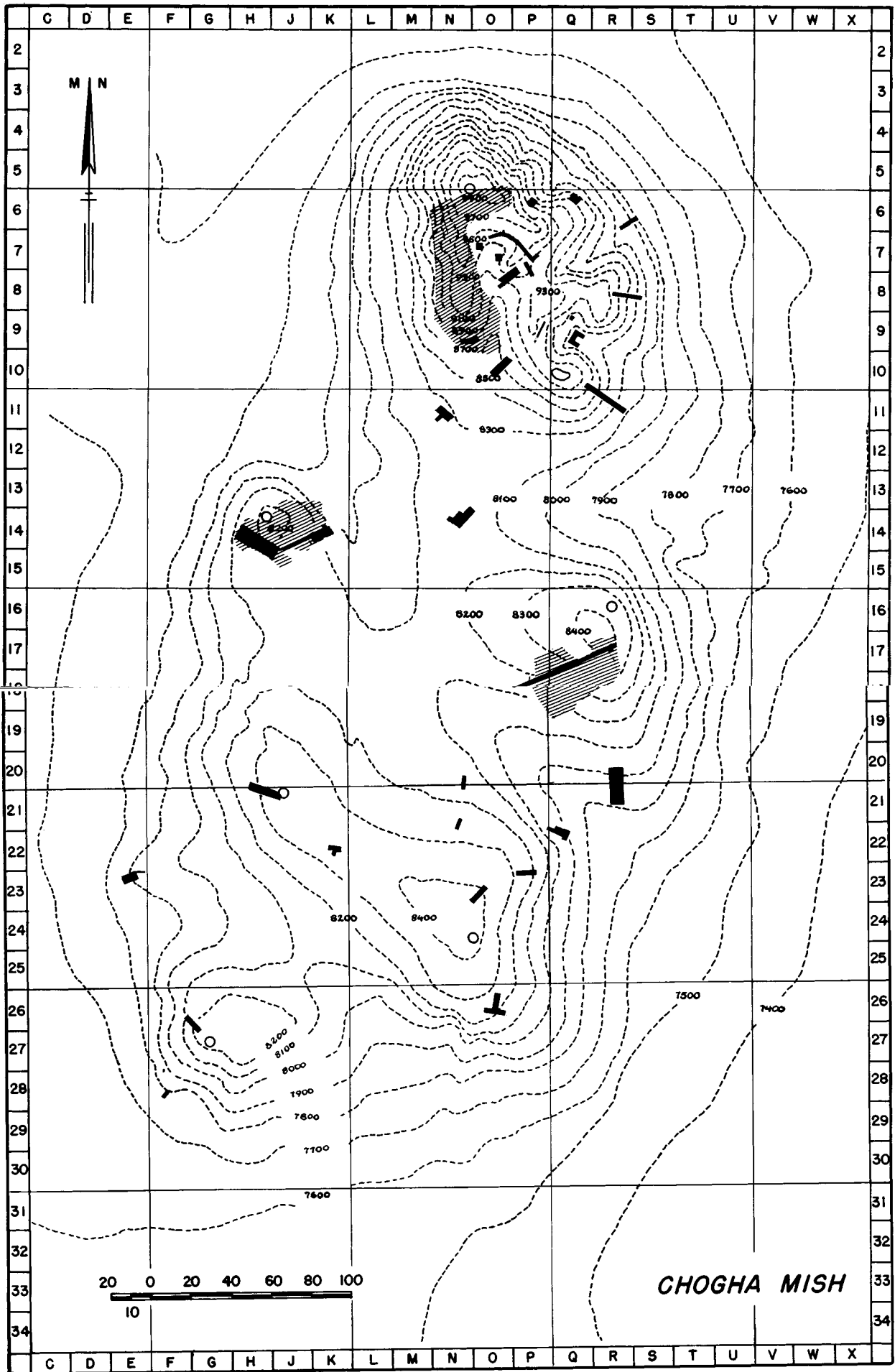
The site itself, roughly rectangular in shape, is oriented in

length almost exactly north-south. Ancient remains can be located immediately below the surface in an area about 300 meters wide and 600 meters long, that is, approximately 45 acres. However, there is little doubt that the surrounding fields, the surface soil of which consists largely of materials washed down from the higher parts of the site, cover similar remains and that the ancient site must have been considerably larger, probably 60–70 acres.

Topographically Chogha Mish consists of two parts. The northern part, the “Main Mound,” comprises about one-fifth of the total area and consists of a series of steep ridges and gullies, with the highest point more than 25 meters above the surrounding plain. The southern and considerably larger area is much less rugged and features five less prominent elevations reaching only about 8–10 meters above the surrounding fields. This area is known as the “Terrace.” The whole site is thickly covered with potsherds. Under certain conditions a trained observer may detect indications of building remains below the surface.

When we first came to the site in 1961, the entire Terrace area was under cultivation, and we had to confine our excavations to the Main Mound. During the second season, which coincided with a phase of the recent land reform when redistribution and transfer of ownership of land was in progress, the whole site lay fallow. We used that opportunity to place more than twenty soundings at strategic points all over it in order to obtain preliminary evidence as to the distribution and the dating of its early settlements. Our main results, previously reported, established the fact that the major large-scale occupation of the site as a whole was during the Protoliterate period and also that wherever our soundings penetrated the Protoliterate remains we encountered various phases of prehistoric occupations.

When we arrived in Khuzestan for our third season of excavation at Chogha Mish, we found much of the southern part of the site once more under cultivation. Consequently, our fifteen new soundings were confined to the northern part of the site, mostly on the Terrace (Trenches XVII–XXII and XXV). Nearly all the trenches on the Terrace were carried down to virgin soil. However, our major operations consisted of extending the excavations at certain locations from isolated soundings into larger coherent areas.



Map of Chogha Mish excavations

The Vicinity of Trench V

During the second season we opened a trench about 50 meters long and 2.5–3.0 meters wide in squares R 17, P 18, and Q 18 (Trench V). Toward the end of the season its northeastern end was extended into a larger area. In square Q 18 we located a segment of a curved wall which, however, could not be traced during that season for lack of time. We kept returning to this curved wall intermittently throughout the third season, for none of our workmen was able at the beginning to cope adequately with the extremely difficult brick-tracing which was involved. However, before the season came to an end, we succeeded in tracing completely, both on the inside and on the outside, a circular structure. Its massive walls, about 1.20 meters thick, are about double the thickness of the ordinary walls of the houses nearby. No entrance or doorway to it existed, at least in its original, earliest version. While great quantities of pottery were found immediately outside, the structure itself contained relatively little pottery and few other objects, but in one of its later reconstructions there was a massive deposit of animal and apparently some human bones. Immediately to the southwest of this circular structure was a very large deposit of pottery almost solidly packed to a thickness of about 60–70 cm. over an area almost as large as the building itself. This deposit contained very few complete vessels except for beveled-rim bowls, which occurred in great numbers, both fragmentary and unbroken. Mixed with the pottery were small objects such as clay stoppers for bottles and jars, slingshots, etc., the most notable of which are unbaked-clay stoppers bearing seal impressions. At the east edge and at a lower level than this deposit was a cobbled pavement which, however, apparently had no connection with the circular structure but antedated it. Two oblong crazy pavements consisting of broken and some whole baked bricks lay over this cobblestone pavement. There seems to have been no connection between these pavements and the circular structure.

The West Central Hill (Squares H–K 13–15)

In attempting to establish the date of the occupation of this part of the site, we began Trenches VI and IX and Sounding C in the second season. In Trench VI, on the northeast slope, we encountered in ash layers immediately below the surface large deposits

of typical Protoliterate pottery. Higher up, however, we found typical long Parthian jars and other late pottery. This late pottery was embedded in very hard soil which upon closer examination proved to consist of irregular mud brick packing. The packing overlay the whole of Trench IX, but a few beveled-rim bowl fragments and other sherds of typical Protoliterate pottery were found in it. Below the packing, especially in Trench IX, were walls built of small bricks and fairly large quantities of Protoliterate pottery. During the past season, therefore, we attempted to establish the limits of the solid packing, hoping also that they might provide clues as to its date. Having located the edge of the packing on one spot in Trench XVII B (square J-14), we traced it for a considerable distance to the northeast by following the wall surface and eventually by tracing single bricks until we reached a point where they had completely disappeared because of erosion. Next we continued the same process toward the south. The results were rather surprising, for the outline of the packing as it began to emerge was polygonal with long heavy buttresses projecting from it. In tracing to the south the outline of what now could be considered a platform rather than an amorphous packing, we came upon a later cutting which led inside the solid brickwork and was widened into a roughly circular hole, about 4 meters in diameter. This hole was filled with rubbish, ashes, and pottery. Obviously the hole and its contents were later than the packing, but all the pottery and every single object found with it was clearly of the Protoliterate period. This firmly established the date of the platform.

The Main Mound

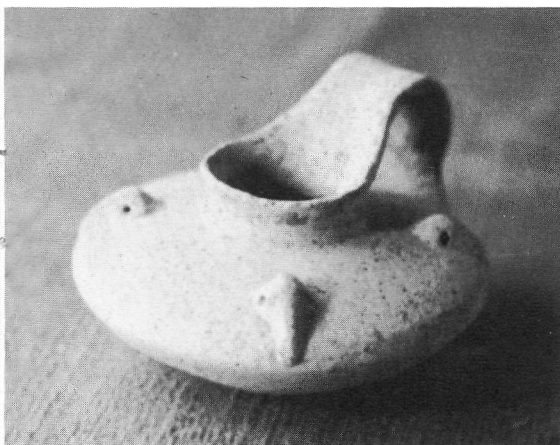
We have known from our very first day of digging at Chogha Mish that Protoliterate remains existed fairly high above a core of prehistoric deposits on the higher part of the site. Last season we resumed investigation of the higher part by approaching it from the south in a series of trenches placed between the excavated areas and the highest point. The location of these trenches (XVIII, XXII, and XXIII) can be seen on the map. Finally we started clearing the southwestern side of the Main Mound where we noticed surface indications of important architectural remains. We began by employing a method which has proved its value on other sites, namely by locating brickwork and then clearing individual

bricks in order to establish the lines of masonry and any change of direction in the brickwork. Once more the results justified this method, for having traced a large number of individual bricks, we were soon able to distinguish not only different sizes but also different alignments of bricks at different heights. Other surface indications led us to dig alongside the bricks, where we were rewarded by a mass of Protoliterate pottery extremely interesting in itself and, even more important, dating the lower brickwork. We have thus located on the lower slope the main part of a monumental edifice of the Protoliterate period with walls nearly 4 meters thick. These overlay directly a hill formed entirely of prehistoric deposits and in turn blended into an even more massive structure of a much later period, probably Elamite. We have recognized a wall running roughly north-south at the top of the northwest side of the Main Mound for a distance of about 80 meters, its thickness, including buttresses or towers, reaching 11.5 meters. Still higher up on the Main Mound we found remnants of Parthian walls, dated by fair amounts of pottery.

Finds

By far the largest bulk of our finds consisted of pottery. Pottery of the Protoliterate period was unearthed in overwhelming quantities. Having had a foretaste of this situation in the previous seasons and in order to save all pertinent evidence that the pottery may reveal, Professor Kantor and I felt it necessary to devise a special method for recording. This new method aims at a total quantitative as well as qualitative analytical recording. Chogha Mish has already produced the largest corpus of Protoliterate pottery known, among which there are many new types and others which provide evidence of close relations with other sites and regions. Of special interest are two ritual vases, one having an elaborate incised decoration and another decorated in relief with goats attacked by snakes.

The small finds are too numerous and diversified to be discussed within the limits of this report. The little bull gives some idea of the artistic quality of even such an unpretentious class of objects as clay figurines. Undoubtedly the most significant single class of finds, and, in a way, the most difficult to deal with, is the large number of cylinder seal impressions on unbaked clay. These



Left: Extremely rare type of Protoliterate vessel combining strap handle and legs.

Right: A very large complete jar of the Protoliterate period in the court of the expedition house at Chogha Mish.



Bull from the Protoliterate period from Chogha Mish



Protoliterate cylinder seal impression on clay

vary from nearly complete impressions on large conical sealings or on hollow balls to minute fragments which were recovered by means of sifting debris. To piece together such fragments into complete coherent seal designs and to draw them for publication is a difficult task requiring a unique combination of exceptional knowledge of glyptic, artistic ability, and infinite patience.

Eighteen crates containing the Institute's share of our last season's finds at Chogha Mish are on their way to Chicago. Part of the Teheran Museum's share of our finds from the second season are being sent to us on loan for study and publication by special permission of the Iranian Council of Ministries. Our application for a similar loan of finds from the last season is under active consideration. We hope that it will be granted. For in the field, under constant pressure of a strenuous regime, one gets but glimpses of the new horizons opened up by one's own finds. There it is impossible to do all the work which is needed to establish their rightful place in the wider scheme of cultural history.