

## Excavations at Chogha Mish

HELENE J. KANTOR, *Co-Director*

The third season of excavations at Chogha Mish conducted by the Joint Iranian Expedition of the Oriental Institute and the University of California at Los Angeles took place during January, February, and March, 1972. It got off to a prompt start with the assembly of the staff at the beginning of January in Tehran. Professor P. P. Delougaz of U.C.L.A. and Helene J. Kantor were joined by Mr. D. D. Bickford, AIA, who had already before contributed valuable assistance to the Expedition in 1969/70, by Miss J. Vindenas, who for many years guided the fortunes of the Oriental Institute Library in Chicago, and by two students on Ford Foundation archeological grants, Mrs. B. Elder of U.C.L.A. and Mr. R. G. Hassert of the University of Chicago. With their usual courtesy Mr. A. A. Pourmand, Director-General of the Archaeological Service, Mr. S. M. Khorramabodi, Assistant Director, and Dr. H. T. Naimi, Director of Excavations, expedited the official arrangements in Tehran. Our collaborator from the Archaeological Service, Mr. R. M. Zahedani was throughout the season a most pleasant and helpful colleague. We were also happy to have as a collaborator for several weeks at the beginning of the season and again at the end Professor Y. Majidzadeh. He brought with him three of his students, Messrs. Hasan Gharekhani, Aghil Abedi Lohesar, and Said Mansur Said Sadjadi, who entered enthusiastically into

the tasks of learning and applying our methods of work. Dr. M. C. McCutchan, of Damavand College, Tehran, again spent her Nowruz holiday working with us.

One of the main goals of the season was to continue where we had left off the previous year—by digging deeper in the various “prehistoric trenches” to expand our knowledge of the Middle and Early Susiana cultures of the fifth and sixth millennia B.C. and of the preceding Archaic phases representing the earliest known settlements of the central Susiana plain. In addition we hoped to reopen the important East Quarter of the Protoliterate city of the late fourth millennium B.C. These plans were considerably affected by the exceptionally heavy rainfall in Khuzestan both before our arrival and throughout our entire stay. Digging was frequently interrupted for some days and was impossible in certain spots on the mound. Trench XIII was waterlogged at the beginning of digging and remained so most of the season. Accordingly, it could not be reopened this year despite its great importance for the prehistoric development. The rains also prevented us from developing to any extent Trenches XXXI, XXXII, and the Gully Cut, all of which had yielded excellent results last year. We adapted to the weather conditions while at the same time advancing our goals by working from the surface down in a number of carefully selected areas.

*Trenches XXXIII, XXXIV, and XXXV.* Early in the season we opened a ten-meter square, Trench XXXIII, on the gently sloping flank of the large East Quarter of the Protoliterate city. The original intention was to conduct a quick test before using this area for dumping. The top meter of debris contained only washed-down Protoliterate sherds without architectural context, indicating that the Protoliterate private houses of the East Quarter had not reached this far. Approximately in the middle of the trench was the face of a great mass of compact clay, which filled the entire eastern half of the square and was founded on a dark ashy stratum. Against the face of this pisé massif a large heap of slag had been thrown downwards from the direction of the Protoliterate houses. We sought for the eastern face by opening two narrow trenches, XXXIV and XXXV, at an angle to Trench XXXIII. During March, in our only spell of relatively dry weather, we struck what promises to be the eastern face of the pisé massif, but it could not be cleared because the frequent heavy rains between then and the end of

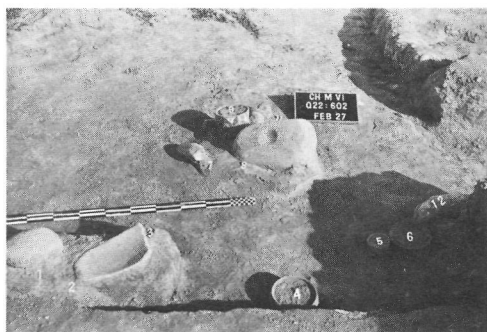
the season kept this part of the excavations soaked. The evidence obtained so far suggests that we have here a massive wall at least ten meters wide and preserved to about two meters in height, which may well be a portion either of a city wall or of a substantial fortification. At the moment its date remains uncertain. Some good evidence suggests the Protoliterate period. No Protoliterate city walls have yet been discovered, and it would be fitting to find one at Chogha Mish, only a relatively short distance from the spot where in 1966 the seal impression showing the surrender of a besieged city was discovered. However, a Middle Susiana date for the pisé massif cannot yet be altogether excluded. If it is actually a fortification of that period, it will give a surprising new dimension to the character of the large Middle Susiana town of Chogha Mish. In either case the results yielded by this part of the excavation have turned out to be far more important than anticipated, and the area demands further investigation.



*The northern part of the Trench XXI area with Trench XXV in the background. Photo by P. P. Delougaz*

*The Trench XXI Area.* This area, already extended last season with excellent results, was enlarged on all sides except the east. The biggest addition was made on the north, where the entire space between Trench XXI and our old Trench XII of 1963 was opened up. The Trench XXI area is now about 800 square meters in size and has so far yielded structures datable

to three major periods. In the higher, western, part of the sharply sloping area the walls and hearths of some medium-sized rectangular rooms of the beginning phase of the Middle Susiana period occur. The underlying architectural stage, well-dated to the Early Susiana period, is more substantial. A large number of walls, some of them preserved to a height of over a meter, form rooms, either approximately square or of more elongated rectangular shape. In some cases partition walls subdivide the main rooms. Undoubtedly several subphases of one major architectural period are represented.



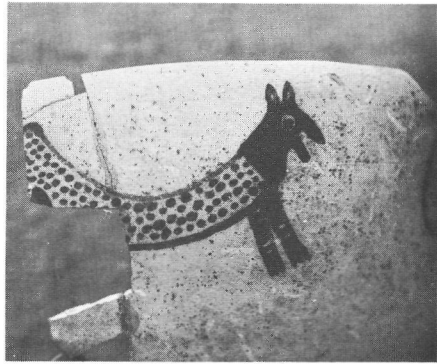
*Deposit of the Early Susiana period as found in Trench XXI and intact bowl of bituminous stone (No. 5) from the deposit. Photos by R. G. Hassert*

There were many interesting architectural details in the Early Susiana levels. Thus, not all the walls were of unbaked mud bricks; some consist of pounded clay, as for example the curving apsidal walls of a small room. Numerous hearths occurred. Sometimes they were elaborate, consisting of low mud walls surrounding a rectangular or oval area and with piles of calcined river pebbles lying on a hard floor.

Immediately below the Early Susiana levels were the remains of walls constructed of the long finger-marked bricks which in previous seasons we have found to be typical for the Archaic period. They could be reached only in the lowest, most eroded parts of the Trench XXI area on the east, and adjacent to old Trench XII. The rest of the Archaic walls are still hidden under the Middle and Early Susiana remains, which could not be removed this season, shortened as the digging time was by the incessant rains. The excavation of the Archaic levels, which promise to yield coherent plans, is one of the most important

aims of our next season, since the large scale and quality of this architecture seem extraordinary for such an early period.

*Trench XXV.* Our goal in extending Trench XXV by an additional one hundred square meters was to test whether certain substantial Archaic walls found in previous seasons continued under the debris to the east. This season's extension provided surprises. The Middle Susiana remains were more extensive than any hitherto found in the Trench XXV area and included a pavement of unbaked bricks and a kiln over two meters in diameter. The weather and the intricacy of the stratification of the Middle Susiana remains combined to prevent us from clearing the Archaic level in most of the Trench XXV extension, though deeper cuttings on the southern and eastern edges of the area did reach both Early Susiana and Archaic remains.



*Middle Susiana sherd decorated with mask-like human heads (left) and sherd of egg-shell ware bowl decorated with a file of leopards. Photos by R. G. Hassert*

*The Finds.* This season brought the usual harvest of small objects such as spindle whorls, sling shots, stone querns and grinding implements, and flints, while pottery continued to appear in the profusion normal to Chogha Mish. Some of this year's outstanding categories of finds are as follows.

Major additions to the pottery repertoire of the second phase of the Middle Susiana period came from Trenches XXV and

XXXIII. They include two vessels of the thin, painted ware such as are rarely found entire. Their shapes provide models for reconstructing many of the elegantly painted sherds of thin ware. The painted decoration includes both geometric and representational designs. This year our menagerie of painted animals was greatly increased by a large tortoise, birds, bull heads, an entire bull figure, ibexes, and a leopard. Perhaps most surprising of all is the file of donkeys, with characteristic heads, ears, and manes added to the stylized bodies typical of Middle Susiana quadrupeds. Mask-like human heads and small human figures with linked arms also appear.

The finds of pottery of the initial stage of the Middle Susiana period, consisting of sherds and some complete or semicomplete vessels, mostly from the Trench XXI area, contribute much to our knowledge of the individuality of this phase of the Susiana sequence.

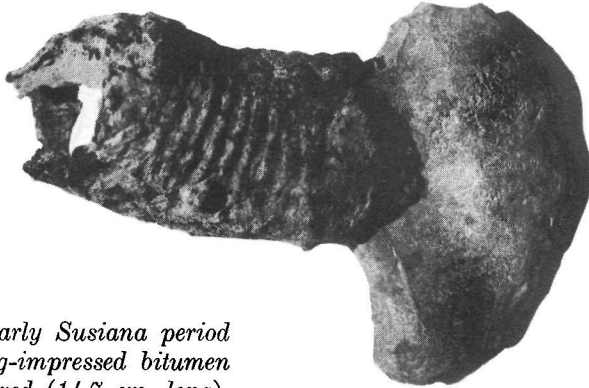


*Lid from  
the large sherd deposit  
of Early Susiana date found in  
Trench XXI. Photo by R. G.  
Hassert*

The Early Susiana period is represented by a massive deposit of sherds found outside one of the rooms of Trench XXI. Many hours of painstaking work by the sherd boys resulted in the recovery of large sections of huge storage vessels, of a "graduated set" of oval basins, and of many other unpainted vessels. There were also a number of painted ones, including lids with their most elaborate decoration on the outside and a rectangular bowl with an animal's head modeled in the round. In addition to the massive sherd deposit, Trench XXI also yielded a deposit of objects that had remained in position since the Early Susiana period—small pottery vessels, a bituminous stone bowl,

a quern and grinding stone, all grouped around a large stone with a round depression on one side and a trough on the other.

Two complete stone objects from Early Susiana levels of the Trench XXI area are unique: a hoe, the only example of a well-known type to have been found with its bitumen hafting



*Hoe of the Early Susiana period  
with its string-impressed bitumen  
hafting preserved (14.7 cm. long).  
Photo by P. P. Delougaz*

completely preserved, and a tool with a short handle and axe-like cutting blade, all shaped from one piece of stone. A small, highly stylized terracotta human head modeled in the round represents another of the crafts of the Early Susiana period.

This season's work at Chogha Mish has considerably advanced our knowledge of several millennia of prehistoric development in Khuzestan. The remains of Archaic architecture, pottery, and small objects provide new evidence for the substantial extent and complexity of the first phases of the sequence, which may be as early as the seventh millennium B.C. Analyses of organic remains such as animal bones will add their contribution to the story. The continuity of the cultural development in the Susiana plain, at least from the final phase of the Archaic period on, has come into much clearer focus this season. Many more connections with prehistoric cultures in Mesopotamia have been added; they demonstrate the existence at some times of markedly close relations between the two regions. In prehistoric times Chogha Mish was a great focal center of the Susiana plain with a continuous occupation running parallel to the Mesopotamian sequences of early cultures.