

EXCAVATIONS AT CHOOGHA MISH

Helene J. Kantor

This year's season at Chogha Mish was the tenth conducted at the site, the seventh supported jointly by the Oriental Institute and the University of California at Los Angeles, and the first without Professor P. P. Delougaz. Despite his loss, our colleagues in Los Angeles have remained interested and actively involved in the Chogha Mish excavations. A great debt is owed to Professor Giorgio Buccellati, Director of the Institute of Archaeology of U.C.L.A., and to Professor John G. Burke, Dean of the College of Letters and Science, who arranged for U.C.L.A.'s share in this season's budget, without which we could not have had a normal digging season. The Expedition also is deeply grateful to several of its friends whose generous contributions came most opportunely in this year of inflation.

The staff, in addition to the writer, consisted of Mr. Aghil Abedi, Dr. Charles Adelman, Mr. Richard J. Le Fevre, Mr. Daniel Shimabuku, Mr. St. John Smith, and Miss Johanne Vindenas. The only member new to the site was Mr. Le Fevre, an architect from England making his first venture into archeological architecture. Mr. Abedi, the representative of the Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research, in addition to his official duties, worked as a regular and valued member of the staff. Fortunately, Miss Vindenas was again with us and, by dint of untiring devotion and long hours, kept abreast of the sherd and object registration, as well as pottery recording. Mr. Daniel Shimabuku from U.C.L.A., who had been brought to Chogha Mish in the seventh and eighth seasons by Professor Delougaz, bore the brunt of the detailed supervision of the digging and kept the field notebooks; much of the season's success is owed to his skill and indefatigable work.

From our arrival on December 27th to our departure on April 3rd, the season was dominated by the weather. Never in the memory of any of the villagers had there been a winter of such continual rain. We were housebound more frequently than in any previous season. Moreover, the areas of the terrace on which we had expected to expend a major part of our effort remained sodden almost the whole period. Thus our work had to be adapted to the exceptional meteorological circumstances.

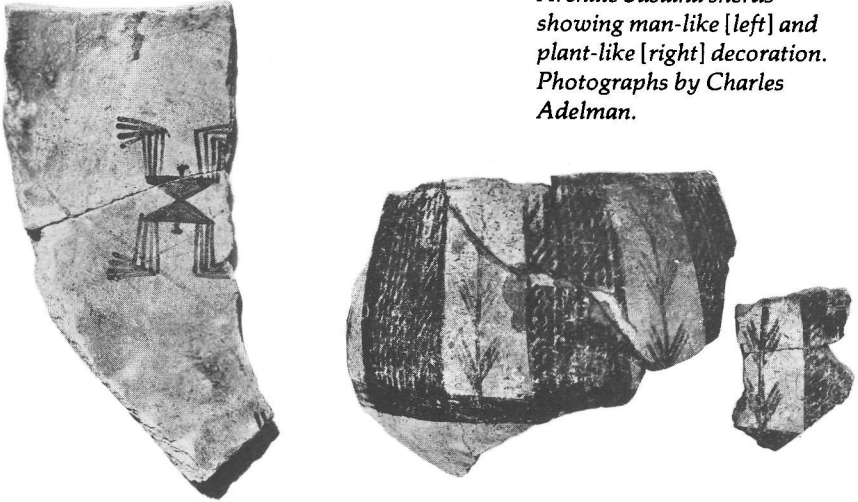
The goals of this season were those that Professor Delougaz and I had set up during the latter part of last season, namely:

- (1) to investigate the earliest part of the Archaic Susiana period, by digging the deposits now exposed at the bottom of the low-lying "Gully Cut";
- (2) to explore in the East Area of the terrace the full extent and environs of the Burnt Building, which represents the culminating phase of the Middle Susiana town;
- (3) to continue the search for evidence on one of our major problems, the character of the structures on the acropolis of the Protoliterate city by excavating in the vicinity of the great Protoliterate drain found last year.

The plan had been to work in at least three areas, each of which would provide evidence for a different major period in the occupation of Chogha Mish. In the event, we did make important advances on all of these fronts, but not in the manner originally visualized. Since it was impossible to conduct systematic excavations in the constantly renewed mud of the areas on the terrace, our main excavating was on the high mound where the subsoil was not completely soaked, as on the terrace, and where the rain water ran off and dried fairly quickly. As a result, two other periods during which only the high part of Chogha Mish was occupied became centers of our attention, namely the final Late Susiana stage of the prehistoric Susiana sequence and the Elamite remains of the early 2nd millennium B.C. All together, then, we dealt this season with five different periods of the Chogha Mish settlement, which will be reviewed here, beginning with the earliest.

Archaic and Early Susiana Periods

Although the weather allowed no excavation of these levels in the Gully Cut, the recording of the pottery groups of the ninth season and of a few left over from the eighth was completed. The sherds in question were all still available since the pottery excavated from each small individual area (locus) is laid out in sherd yards in regular avenues day by day with each group separated from its neighbors by stones painted with all the pertinent information and sunk into the ground. This arrangement amounts to a "filed storage" in which sherds can remain even between seasons as, fortunately, they are not of interest to the normal passerby. It would be quite out of the question to process all sherds in the expedition house, as Chogha Mish produces pottery in such quantities that there would be no room after a few days. Selected sherds are eventually brought into the house, but



*Archaic Susiana sherds
showing man-like [left] and
plant-like [right] decoration.
Photographs by Charles
Adelman.*

only after a long process in the field: washing, sorting, looking for fragments belonging to one vessel, mending, and labeling. Only after this can the detailed recording on our specially devised pottery sheets be undertaken. The selected sherds which had been brought into the house from the Gully Cut sherd yard were recorded and then the remainder of each group still in "storage" on the site was added to make our record of all sherds found complete. From this work gratifying results are emerging.

The Chogha Mish finds are demonstrating in a striking manner the individuality of the prehistoric culture of the Susiana plain. Different though Susiana pottery may be in manifestations separated by hundreds of years there has seemed no possibility of a break in its continuous development except perhaps between the Archaic and the Early Susiana periods. The Archaic itself is marked by striking continuity between its three phases, as well as by the appearance in the last one of a new cultural element represented by the Close-line Ware. The pottery recorded this season has much enlarged our knowledge. For example, the meager number of designs painted on the interior base of Close-line Ware bowls is increased by a lively motif in which almost completely abstract elements suggest human form. Among the many new examples of the Matt-painted Ware is the large segment of a deep bowl painted with delicate plant-like sprays in place of the strictly geometric motifs so far found on that ware. Furthermore, a transitional phase between the Archaic and Early Susiana is indicated by sherds on which the very regular strokes of the Close-line Ware

have become coarser or changed into isolated groups of bold lines. A less obvious but also very diagnostic characteristic of the transitional phase is the change from the normal Archaic straw tempering to a tempering of smaller chaff particles. Thus, with the appearance of many transitional elements among some of the groups, the pottery from the Gully Cut has firmly closed the only remaining presumptive gap in the continuity of the Susiana prehistoric culture.

The Burnt Building of the Middle Susiana Period

One of the main problems concerning the plan of this building was its delimitation to the east. Last season the east wall blended into a mass of brickwork extending some 15 meters eastward. This problem was solved by Mr. James Knudstad, who was for many years the Oriental Institute architect. When the Chogha Mish excavations began in 1961 he had worked with us briefly until unfortunately called away by duties elsewhere, and never afterwards had our schedules coincided. Now in a short visit between other commitments he made a major contribution. Rain-washed plaster faces on the eastern "niche" of the front room gave him a clue which he followed by scraping top surfaces of brickwork slightly. The wet conditions made it possible to observe color differentiations and thin plaster lines. On the basis of these indications it appears that the expanse of brickwork to the east had been built up secondarily against the buttressed east facade of the building, changing the doorway on that side into a niche. The traces of buttresses discerned by Jim Knudstad in the east and also in the south side of the building link up with those excavated last year on the west side of its central part. Accordingly, Richard Le Fevre was able to draw a more complete plan of the Burnt Building. It now appears as an even more impressively regular and monumental structure than it did last season. The new information goes far to substantiate Professor Delougaz' hypotheses as to the significance of the building. It almost certainly continued farther to the west. Work in this area remains as one of the most important projects for next season.

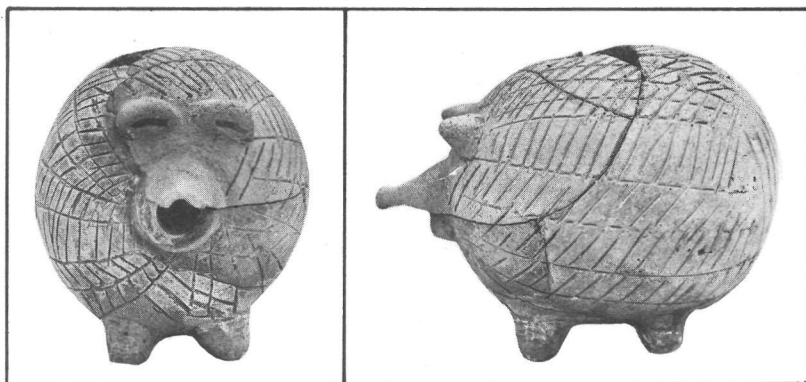
The Late Susiana Period

At the close of the period represented by the Burnt Building, the town of Chogha Mish became much smaller. During the Late Susiana period people lived only on the northern third of the site, which thus gradually grew into a high mound. A narrow deep trench, XXIII, dug to test the stratigraphy of the southwestern spur of the high mound, had yielded traces of Protoliterate remains at the surface and thick deposits of Late Susiana debris overlying Middle Susiana deposits; but

we had had to stop before reaching virgin soil. This season we enlarged Trench XXIII in order to complete the stratigraphic sequence, which would be an important addition to our knowledge since, in contrast to the terrace, on the high mound we have reached virgin soil in only one tiny area. For our historical conclusions as to the economic and social development of the Chogha Mish area we need to determine the extent of the settlements preceding the large fifth millennium B.C. town of the Middle Susiana period. In Trench XXIII soft ashy layers with sherds of the Late Susiana period sloped upwards towards the periphery of the mound, a circumstance which we had already noticed in the first major trench, Number II, dug on the east part of the mound during the first and second seasons. In Trench XXIII the ashy layers abut on the outer-slope side against densely packed hard brick-like materials, which were a difficult problem to disentangle. It is quite possible that we have here not just ordinary house walls, but in part at least, elements forming together a heavy retaining wall such as has been observed at Late Susiana levels at other sites. The recalcitrant nature of the hard materials made it impossible to go down through the Late Susiana levels of Trench XXIII quickly. We have, however, after digging about four meters and obtaining a good cross section of Late Susiana pottery, reached a heavy clay floor covering the entire extension of the trench and sealing everything that lies underneath. This was an ideal place to stop; the deep deposits below must wait until next season.

The Protoliterate Period

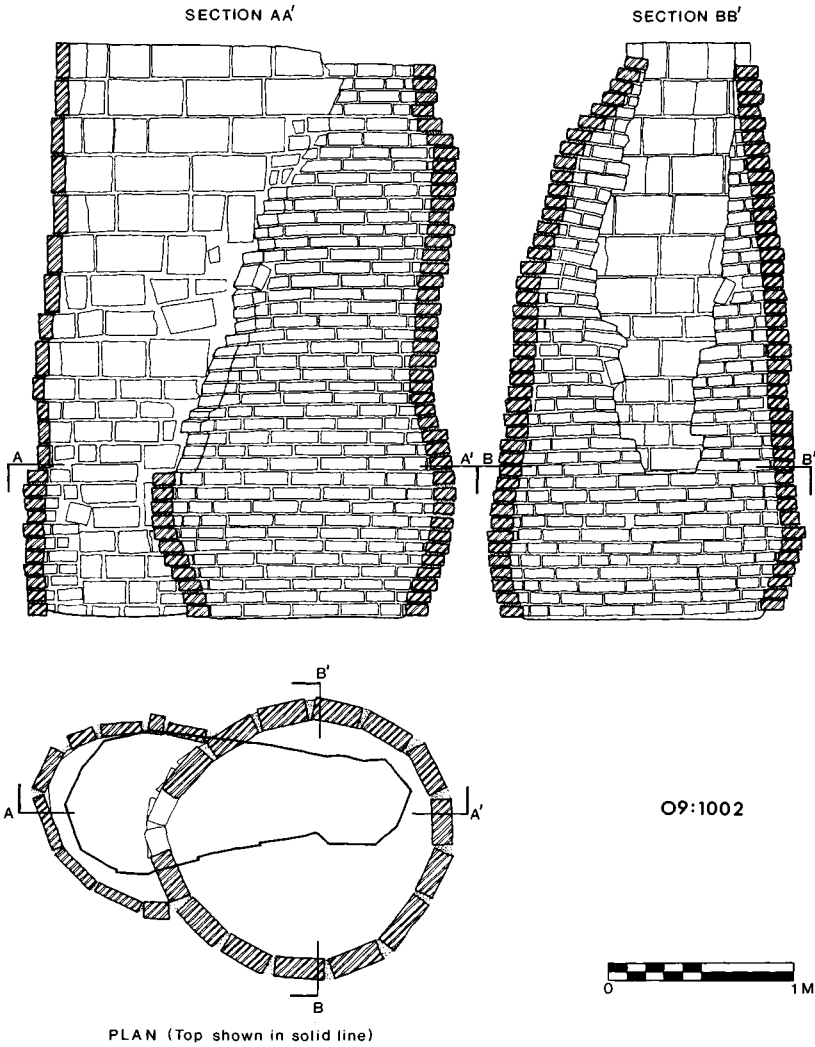
At the opening of the season we began with Protoliterate levels in the east area both for their intrinsic interest and also as a "trial run" before tackling the more difficult problems of the Protoliterate remains on the high mound. In a surface strip running all along the northern edge of the East Area, the highest portion of this part of the terrace, mud-brick walls, thicker and also better preserved than most of the other previously excavated walls of the area, immediately appeared. The pottery was relatively scanty for a Protoliterate level. Since we were granted only three days of work here, there was no possibility of testing the unspoken hypothesis that perhaps these rooms had been part of a public building with better "housekeeping" than in ordinary private houses. One of these incompletely excavated rooms provided the most delightful object of the season, a pottery vessel in the shape of a hedgehog. His nose is formed by a spout; projecting appliques recessed in front render both the ears and eyes of the little creature. At the back he has a tail and two stubby legs. The latter allowed our



A Protoliterate hedgehog. Photographs by Daniel Shimabuku.

senior pottery restorer to make a skillful restoration of the missing forelegs and right side of the body. The incisions covering the body can be interpreted as the hedgehog's spines. Though this vessel is unique in its details, in general character it is analogous to the two animal-shaped vessels discovered by Professor Delougaz many years ago in the Protoliterate Sin Temple at Khafajah. One of the main differences is that the Chogha Mish hedgehog has only a small hole on its back while the Khafajah bird and bull have high, narrow necks. On Protoliterate cylinder seals and the Warka stone vase theriomorphic vessels appear as temple objects used to pour libations. This may have been the role of our hedgehog; the vessel could hardly have a practical purpose of daily life for which innumerable spouted vessels were available. The rains forced us to abandon this promising area with walls disappearing into unexcavated soil. It is one of our first priorities for the coming season.

Work on the high mound began on the slopes somewhat lower than the great baked-brick drain of the previous season and involved us in complicated problems of stratigraphy since Elamite remains are here dug down into the Protoliterate ones. The stumps of some Protoliterate walls enclosing small hearth-like constructions with clusters of beveled-rim bowls and the mouths of two installations built of baked bricks appeared close to the modern surface. The latter we first thought to be kilns since in size and general shape they resembled two simple earth-cut kilns of the East Area. However, as excavation proceeded, the complexity of these constructions became apparent. Both were well built of baked bricks, and both expanded underground to a size much wider than their mouths. They reached a depth of 3.20



Plan and sections of a Protoliterate baked brick structure. Drawings by Richard F. Le Fevre.

meters and 3.00 meters respectively. The one which is closest to Professor Delougaz' drain was corbelled to produce a narrow mouth of rectangular shape. The other baked-brick construction was oval at the top. It had originally been a well-bonded structure, circular in section, but later its north side was broken through in order to add an enlargement of strikingly different construction—bricks placed on their narrow ends as shown in the plan and elevations of Mr. Le Fevre. This structure contained literally more sherds than earth and in addition masses of bones.

The problem of interpretation remains. The structures are too deep to have been kilns. The roughness of their walls on the inside and the absence of a paved floor at the bottom would seem to preclude them from having been granaries or cisterns. On the other hand their careful construction and expensive building material seem to be inconsistent with such a mundane purpose as the disposal of refuse or water. Whatever their purpose, the absence of comparable structures on the terrace suggests strongly that these baked-brick installations must have been associated with a very important area. The appearance of such a high level of substantial Protoliterate structures and walls was probably the biggest surprise of the season and holds a promise of important discoveries when we can reach those parts of the Protoliterate level now covered by Elamite remains.

The Elamite Period

The long top ridge of the southwest spur of the high mound harbors at the surface parts of the thick west wall of the Elamite fort dug in the third and fourth seasons and hypothetically restored by Professor Delougaz in our interim report on the first five seasons. Small patches of the brick work of this uppermost Elamite phase occurred in the north parts of this season's excavation. Probably belonging to this final Elamite phase are two children's burials and the drain sunk into the Protoliterate levels. The drain, not yet completely uncovered, consisted of at least five pipes, each fifty centimeters in diameter. They had been set into a narrow shaft, the digging of which had left undisturbed a Protoliterate beveled rim bowl a few centimeters away.

The walls of at least two earlier Elamite building phases occurred below the level of the brick work just under the surface. Several were of impressive dimensions. One long wall, based on a projecting footing of hard unbaked bricks, had traces of painted dadoes, white above and red below. Beside it were some chunks of clay moldings brightly painted in white and red; they were face-downwards as if fallen from the tip of the wall or the ceiling. Another wall near the



Part of the excavations on the high mound, showing the painted Elamite wall and its foundations. Photograph by H. J. Kantor.

painted one, apparently of an earlier phase, abuts on a baked brick pavement, which was not completely cleared since in the few remaining days of the season the massive later Elamite remains covering part of it could not be removed. In its present state this pavement looks like part of a monumental entrance. It is at the edge of the central hollow of the high mound, the erosion of which led Professor Delougaz to postulate the existence there of the main gate of the Elamite fort.

What we have found of the Elamite constructions this season proves the existence of several phases of large buildings. Their scale is such that we can only expect to recover their plans by the ambitious clearance of considerable parts of the high mound. This season we have reached parts of those buildings at the eroded slopes of the southwest spur of the high mound where little remained of the heavy brickwork of the final Elamite phase. Our results already give much more substance and importance to the Elamite occupation of Chogha Mish. The monumental character of the buildings and the painted decoration present in at least one phase provide a fitting setting now for the magnificent goat-handled cup discovered by Professor Delougaz a year ago. To that work of art we have added this season our first Elamite seal impression. Incompletely preserved conical



The design of the Elamite seal impressions; the unshaded leaflets are restored. Drawing by H. J. Kantor.

sealings have several rollings of a squat cylinder seal. Though the clay of the sealings and their preservation are not very good, the design can be reconstructed. Within frond-like borders are two human figures with wings springing from their waists; they raise their arms in atlantid fashion, as if supporting each other.

Much still remains to be learned about the Elamite occupation at Chogha Mish. Though in general it can be dated to the earlier part of the second millennium B.C., before the periods of the cities of Haft Tepe and Chogha Zanbil, the possibilities of defining its range more precisely must be investigated. What was the character of the settlement? We know that it was limited to the high mound where there would have hardly been space for small buildings in addition to the large buildings. At present we can only speculate that an important administrator or the commanding officer of a garrison occupied what must have been splendid buildings for their time. Only further excavation can answer the new questions which have arisen this season.