

CHOGHA MISH AND CHOGHA BONUT

Helene J. Kantor

A SHORT VISIT to Iran at the beginning of November 1977 to participate in the *Rencontre de Suse*, organized to mark the eightieth anniversary of the French expedition house at Susa, and the VIth Annual Symposium on Archaeological Research in Iran in Tehran provided a prelude to the season for me. At the beginning of January 1978 the staff gathered in the expedition house: Mr. Guillermo Algaze (University of Chicago), Miss Mansura Niamir (University of Toronto), and Mr. James Simson (Sheffield University), archeologists; Miss Diana Olson (Art Institute of Chicago), photographer; and Miss Fatimeh Pajuhandeh, the representative of the Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research. During brief working visits at the end of the season Dr. Robert Gordon of Demavand College, Tehran, and Dr. Yousef Majidzadeh of Tehran University contributed importantly to our work by, respectively, surveying and supervising the excavation of a central building. Mr. Aghil Abedi, our ICAR representative for the past three seasons but this year working at the Haft Tepe excavations, gave us valuable help with pottery when he visited us on some of his days off.

CHOGHA MISH

For Chogha Mish, this year was a study season without excavation. During January we worked in the expedition house on the analysis, cataloguing, drawing, and photographing of pottery and other categories of objects. These included a number of cylinder seal impressions, some with unique representations. One is a symmetrical composition of two ships

with prows in the form of standing human figures drinking from a single vessel by means of straws. These extraordinary "ships" are forerunners of the divine boats of the sun god represented in the glyptic of the Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods in Mesopotamia. The Chogha Mish impression exemplifies the amazingly originitive character of the Protoliterate period. The craftsmen of that era, in the later part of the fourth millennium B.C., developed the major themes and many of the basic canons of the art of Mesopotamia.

In February and March most of our time was devoted to the excavations at Chogha Bonut. It will be recalled that last year, after the bulldozing of this small site was stopped, a brief trial excavation established the existence there of levels antedating the earliest occupation at Chogha Mish, six kilometers to the east. The opportunities to carry back the Susiana sequence to extremely early stages and to uncover in the upper levels a late fifth millennium B.C. village for comparison with Chogha Mish explain the decision to concentrate this season's digging at Chogha Bonut. In addition to continuing in the eastern sector where we began last year, we extended the area to the highest part left by the bulldozing. The "surface" at which we began excavating was, of course, artificial, consisting of the varying depths at which the bulldozer had stopped pushing away the earth. The results of the excavations will be summarized chronologically, beginning with the latest period.

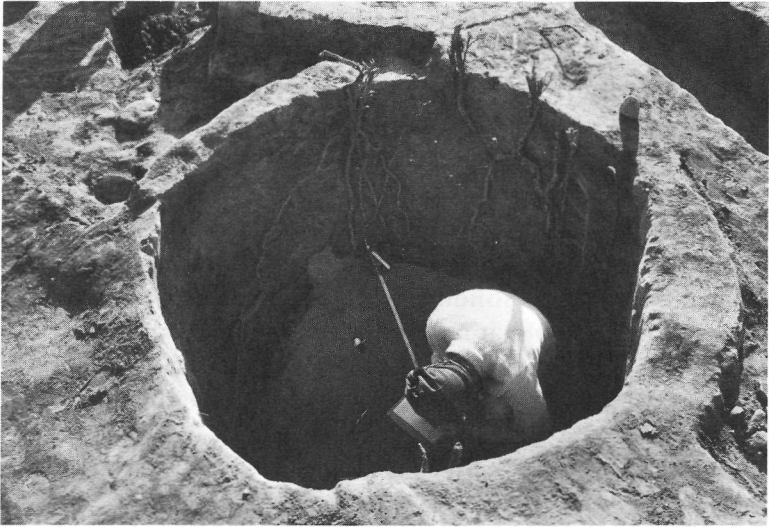
CHOGHA BONUT

THE LATE SUSIANA WELL (EARLY FOURTH MILLENNIUM B.C.). As soon as excavation started we noticed a patch of grey earth bordered on one side by an unusually regular semicircle of roots belonging to a thorn-bush species which survives the arid summers of Khuzestan by sending its roots down to the water table. The feature proved to be a pit 2.30 meters in diameter; it had a lining of hard clay and at intervals thick caps of the same hard clay interrupted the soft ashy fill. The thorn-bush roots were arranged so regularly because they had found their way downwards in crevices between the

caps and the hard lining of the pit. By the end of the season the pit was excavated to a depth of 5.43 meters, but it continues still deeper.

The sherds from the pit differ consistently from those found at the same absolute levels outside it. They are typical for the Late Susiana period. A particularly elegant pattern decorates the fragments of a tall beaker. Often parts of the same vessel were found both high and deep in the pit. Thus, it must have been filled at one time, with the caps of hard clay probably added to solidify the soft earth. The pit was presumably filled when it no longer served its primary purpose; so much effort would hardly have been expended on preparing a rubbish pit to be used only once. Rather, we may assume that the feature was a well dug down to the water table. Interesting as the well is in itself and for its contents, its primary importance is that it provides our only evidence for the existence at Bonut of a Late Susiana settlement. The occupation levels of this period, down from which the well was dug, must have been in the top two meters of the mound destroyed by the bulldozer.

THE MIDDLE SUSIANA 3 REMAINS (LATE FIFTH MILLENNIUM B.C.). The entire Middle Susiana occupation at Bonut belongs to the final part of this long period. Although several building phases can be distinguished, they do not seem to have covered a long stretch of time. In most parts of the excavation, walls and floors were traceable, but often they are too incomplete for the reconstruction of individual house plans. However, the central area which had not been leveled as low as the rest of the mound still sheltered the remains of a complete house. It covers a rectangle 5 by 10 meters in size and some parts of its walls are preserved to a height of almost half a meter. Although the location of the entrance is uncertain, the three interior doors of the house are preserved, making the circulation within it clear. In the north a small room is flanked by an L-shaped one, in one side of which are the thin walls of a bin. To the south a narrow rectangular room extending the full width of the house is subdivided by a thin partition wall. The space to the west was probably for storage, while that to the east served as a passage between the



Mr. James Simson recording a clay cap in the Late Susiana well, Chogha Bonut



Middle Susiana 3 painted pottery

L-shaped room and the southern part of the house. This 3 by 4 meter space may have been a courtyard where cooking and other daily chores were done. Two kilns in the south corners of the building have a floor level higher than that of the presumed courtyard. However, they are so perfectly aligned within it that they must almost certainly have belonged to a now-destroyed rebuilding of the house.

The plan of the central house at Bonut is essentially the same as that of the eastern part of the Burnt Building discovered at Chogha Mish in 1975, namely an L-shaped and a rectangular room in front of a narrow storage area. On the other hand, the contrast between the massive, even monumental execution of the plan at Chogha Mish and the much slighter construction at Bonut testifies to the difference be-



Chogha Bonut: the central house seen from the north

tween a settlement of urban proportions and a small village.

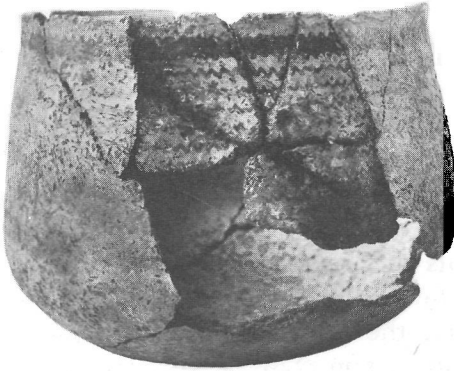
A striking feature of the Middle Susiana 3 levels at Bonut is the number of hearths and kilns. Even though they were not all in use at the same moment, there still seem to be more than would have been needed for domestic purposes. The possibility that some of the installations served for specialized crafts will have to be considered. Structures with sherd floors and inclined, plastered clay walls may well have been pottery kilns. A circular floor, 4 meters in diameter and surrounded by an almost completely destroyed *pisé* wall 30 to 40 centimeters thick, covers most of a slightly lower, similar structure. These are considerably larger than ordinary kilns and their function remains at present uncertain.

Among the Middle Susiana finds pottery is the most common. Many of the vessels were made of unpainted buff or red wares. Others, usually of buff ware, were painted with geometric and, more rarely, representational designs. A number of stone and bone tools were found, the latter including awls and needles. A fragile and attractive ornament, a bull-head pendant of shell, provides a small-scale parallel for large terracotta pendants known from Chogha Mish.

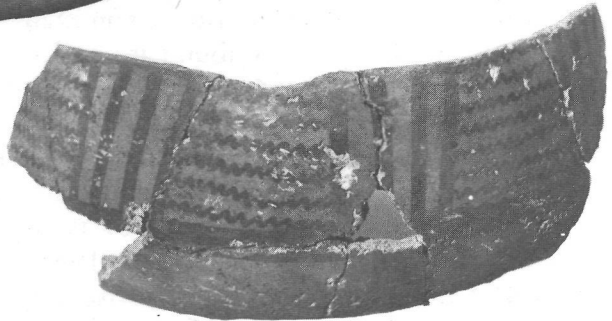
What may be the most significant of this season's Middle Susiana objects from Bonut are several small plaques of kneaded clay. They are impressed on one of the larger sides with either irregularly scattered fingernail imprints, a single round imprint, or both types of imprints together. Despite their smallness, these objects can be called tablets in the sense that they are fairly regularly shaped plaques of clay prepared specifically to receive imprints. That indeed some meaning was attached to these is corroborated by the appearance of a finger-nail imprint on two conical clay tokens. These and unimpressed tokens, the majority spherical in shape, appear in the same ashy debris that provided the primitive tablets. Some centuries later than the end of the Middle Susiana period, the appearance of tablets and the sophisticated use of tokens, placed within hollow clay balls covered outside with seal impressions, characterize the highly developed society of the Protoliterate period. The inconspicuous tablets from Bonut represent a stage of experimentation with recording methods intermediate between the very ancient and wide-



Beaker fragments from the Late Susiana well



Early Archaic Susiana 1:
vessels of Painted Burnished ware



spread use of small clay tokens and the elaborate methods of the Protoliterate period. Gradually, with the accumulation of evidence such as the primitive tablets from Bonut, we may hope to trace antecedents for various complex features of Protoliterate civilization which have seemed to occur with puzzling suddenness.

THE PRIMITIVE PERIODS (BEFORE 6000 B.C.). When the deserted mound of Bonut was reoccupied in Middle Susiana 3 it had suffered over a millennium of erosion. Thus, the footings of Middle Susiana 3 walls were set almost directly on top of the stumps of walls constructed with the long, finger-imprinted bricks which at Chogha Mish are found in the final stage of the Archaic Susiana period. However, at Bonut last year some Painted Burnished sherds found near early walls appeared to date them to Archaic Susiana 1. This conclusion can now be refined by the considerable increase in our knowledge of the early pottery.

The most common representatives of the Painted Burnished ware this year were vessels or sherds with friezes of wavy lines or panels of horizontal wavy and vertical straight lines. Some of the Painted Burnished sherds have rather simple designs not exactly paralleled at Chogha Mish. On the other hand, Bonut has not yet provided various elaborate designs standard for the Painted Burnished ware at Chogha Mish. Such evidence suggests that the Painted Burnished pottery from Bonut represents the earliest stage both of that ware and of the Archaic Susiana 1 period for which it is characteristic. Furthermore, the levels with Painted Burnished sherds frequently also contain examples of wares, such as the Film Painted, not found at Chogha Mish. There is no break between these levels and lower ones where Painted Burnished sherds are absent and the Film Painted ware is a dominant class. This distinctive ware and the others associated with it represent a period still earlier than Archaic Susiana; we are introducing for it the term Formative Susiana. The levels with both Film Painted and Painted Burnished wares can be taken as evidence for a transitional phase at the beginning of Archaic Susiana 1. Apparently Bonut was deserted early in that period.

The testing of our hypothesis as to the character of the Archaic Susiana 1 phase at Bonut, the enlargement of our information about the Formative Susiana period, and the uncovering of the presumed pre-pottery levels at the bottom of the mound are important goals for future work. Both the primitive and the Middle Susiana 3 levels at Bonut take on their full importance, however, only by comparisons with our major site of Chogha Mish, where so much still remains to be done.