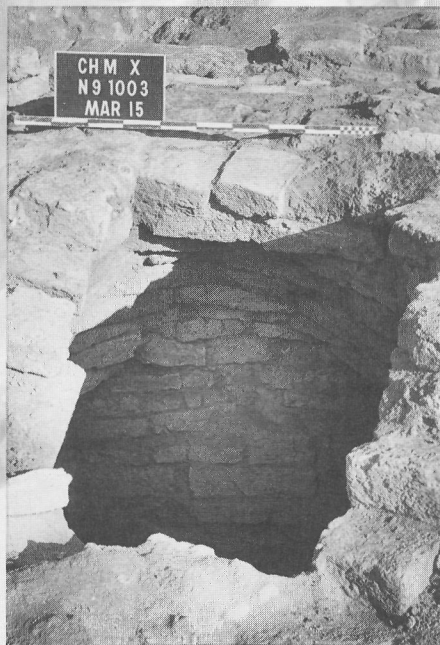


# CHOGHA MISH

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The Chogha Mish project does not have the excitement of newly unearthed discoveries to report. Instead, in recent years our efforts have been devoted to the often unglamorous details attendant on the preparation of the final report covering the first five seasons of excavation. With that process close to completion, it is appropriate to recall some of the main results achieved during our work in southwestern Iran. ▼ Chogha Mish is strategically located close to the northern foothills of the central plain of Khuzestan, the Susiana of the classical geographers. The site, midway between the emergence of the Dez and Karun rivers from the Zagros mountains, controlled one of the main routes of the Susiana plain. The trial season of excavation in 1961 marked the implementation of a plan long-cherished by the late P.P. Delougaz, namely to find in the Susiana area a site where the early phases of elaborate civilization, the Protoliterate period, were not buried under the deep debris of later occupations. Ten exca-

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*Figure 1: Protoliterate pit on the high mound constructed of baked bricks.*

vation seasons and one study season followed. The loss of Delougaz at the end of the ninth season (1975) was a grievous blow, but the project was carried on until changes in Iran made further work impossible (1978).

## The Protoliterate City:

### Topography

Chogha Mish occupies some 18 hectares, with a high area on the north and a lower terrace on the south. After the Protoliterate period (around 3400 B.C.) the terrace lay deserted for over two thousand years, until it was occupied around 600-500 B.C. by an Achaemenid village. In the centuries that followed, the deserted terrace was eroded so that for the most part even the top of the Protoliterate level was destroyed. On the north, however, thick Elamite walls (ca. 2000 B.C.), the removal of which was impractical, covered the Protoliterate remains. They could be explored only in the sloping edges of the mound. Features unparalleled on the terrace indicated the existence of an acropolis with important structures. One was a thick retaining wall of unbaked bricks that may well be part of a platform. Near it were underground pits carefully constructed of small baked bricks (Figure 1). In addition, terracotta cones, well-known at Warka in Mesopotamia as the decoration of Protoliterate temples and public buildings, were ubiquitous on the high mound.

Public structures probably also existed on the highest points of the terrace. A platform of packed earth was found on the northwest, with its top, as preserved, at the modern surface. Only a structure of some importance would have had such a foundation. The likelihood that it was a shrine is increased by the discovery of a jar with two spouts, a type known as a ritual vessel in later times (Figure 2). On the northeastern part of the terrace the occurrence of a cluster of terracotta cones still stuck together

suggests that there, also, a shrine once existed in the midst of private houses separated by narrow lanes with terracotta drains in the middle.



Figure 2: Protoliterate two-spouted jar with appliqué of snakes biting goats.

### Finds

In addition to its size and topography, many complete or fragmentary objects provide outstanding evidence for the surging complexity of Early Protoliterate civilization at Chogha Mish. Of particular significance are seemingly nondescript finds, for example, broken bits of clay with seal impressions. The impressions were made, for the most part, by cylinder seals, an invention of the Protoliterate



Figure 3: Inner surface of a Protoliterate door sealing.

the door sealings well-known in many parts of the ancient Near East in later periods (Figure 3). The conical sealings covered one end of a string looped around a door handle and a wooden peg projecting from the adjacent wall. By making it impossible to open doors without detection, they secured storage rooms and their contents. Their frequency at Chogha Mish (21% of the sealings found) implies the existence of economic conditions of a complexity beyond the routine needs of a single household.

A type of object important as evidence for record keeping and economic activity, and by now much-discussed, is the hollow clay ball covered with seal impressions. Four of the intact examples found in the second season (1963) were x-rayed by Delougaz at The University of Chicago Hospitals, revealing small clay tokens inside. Since the balls were covered by seal impressions the record provided by the tokens within could not be tampered with. Such objects could, for example, have served as bills of lading. In the third season (1965-66), a group of 21 balls was found where it had been secreted under the wall of a room. In the same year an analogous deposit was discovered in Mesopotamia at Warka. The balls were impressed in a standard manner: one seal around the equator and others covering the poles (Figure 4). A likely explanation for this consistent scheme is that the equatorial seal belonged to the main person involved in the record and the polar seals to the witnesses. In the Chogha Mish group a number of different equatorial seals occur. We may speculate that the person who "filed" the balls was the recipient or administrator of deliveries from or dues owed by various individuals.

Chogha Mish also yielded a few tablets, for the most part small fragments. They were impressed by a single cylinder seal, usually only on the obverse but in

period developed in response to the needs of individual persons and officials to safeguard possessions or commodities and to authenticate their transactions. Conically-shaped sealings with the imprints of string and a smooth stick on the inner side are early examples of



Figure 4: Protoliterate clay ball showing equatorial and polar cylinder seal impressions.



Figure 5: Protoliterate tablet with seal impressions and numerals.

tion of art. For example, men guide cattle (Figure 6) or carry boxes (Figure 4). An incomplete design shows a battlefield with bound prisoners (Figure 7). Among the unique scenes from Chogha Mish is one showing a city ruler returning with his retinue by ship from a victorious campaign; he holds a mace and the rope binding two prisoners (Figure 8). The full modelling characteristic for Early Protoliterate cylinder seals and for the art of that phase as a whole is also exemplified by a bone figurine (Figure 9).

Chogha Mish is an excellent representative of an Early Protoliterate city. It shares identical pottery, recording practices, and artistic traditions with Susa, with the great Mesopotamian center, Warka,



Figure 7: Protoliterate cylinder seal design showing a battlefield.

one case also on the narrow sides. A few numerals, long strokes for "1" and round imprints for "10", were imprinted on top of the seal impressions (Figure 5).

The representations preserved by the sealings are a treasury of information concerning human activities and preoccupations, whether political or religious or more mundane, and for the creation of a highly sophisticated tradi-

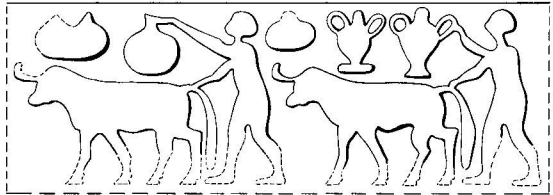


Figure 6: Protoliterate cylinder seal design showing men with cattle.

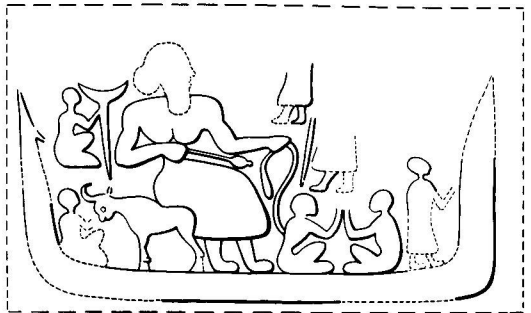


Figure 8: Protoliterate cylinder seal design showing a victorious ruler, enthroned in a ship, holding a mace and rope binding two prisoners.

and with the Protoliterate outposts far away on the Euphrates in Syria. The archaeological evidence mirrors momentous historical developments, the emergence and expansion of the earliest great civilization in Western Asia.

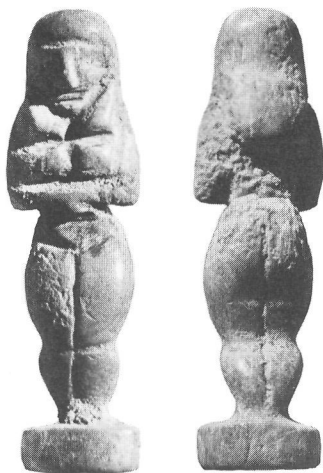


Figure 9: Protoliterate bone figurine.

In the Late Protoliterate period Chogha Mish was deserted, while some thirty-five kilometers to the west, across the large Dez river, the site of Susa continued to flourish. The most likely historical implications of the desertion of Chogha Mish is that Susa had become strong enough to conquer formerly independent local states and to assert its hegemony over the entire Susiana plain.

### The Prehistoric Sequence

Underlying the Protoliterate city, Chogha Mish provided, as a "bonus" not foreseen in the original plan of the project, levels deposited by a long sequence of prehistoric periods. The changing size and character of the settlement were traced by areas of excavation placed strategically over the site. The new evidence for the prehistoric sequence provided some of the most important results of the Chogha Mish project.

### The Character of the Middle Susiana 3 Period

Stratigraphic data accumulated over several seasons increased our precision in recognizing a phase termed by us Middle Susiana 3, and in distinguishing it from the succeeding, Late Susiana, phase. In all areas where excavation was continued below the Protoliterate levels we found characteristic Middle Susiana 3 pottery. This widespread distribution indicated that the entire site was occupied at that time. The revelation of a prehistoric settlement covering a site of about 18 hectares changed our conception of the population density and complexity possible in the Susiana area in the later fifth millennium B.C.

The size and highly developed crafts of the Middle Susiana 3 settlement in themselves imply an advanced stage of development, which was strikingly confirmed by the Burnt Building discovered in the ninth season. Its substantial walls, some of them ca. 1.50 m. thick, the plan of regularly aligned rooms, and the facade with symmetrical buttresses give it a monumental character. A back room was still filled with storage jars (Figure 10). Another room had a stack of thin-walled bowls.

The Burnt Building can be compared with the plan of a contemporary house recovered in a rescue operation at Chogha Bahnut, a small site six kilometers west of Chogha Mish. In the eleventh season (1977), although bulldozing had destroyed the upper part of Bahnut, we were able to salvage the site when, by good fortune, a patch of a Middle Susiana village still remained. The Bahnut house has the same basic plan as

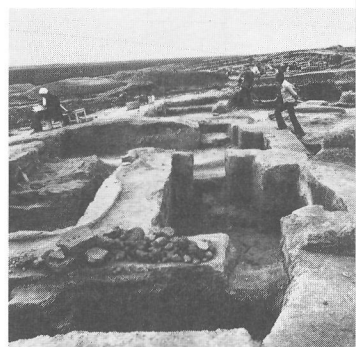


Figure 10: Excavation of the east part of the Middle Susiana 3 Burnt Building, looking from a store room in the back toward the L-shaped front room and the entrance.



Figure 11: Middle Susiana 3 excavated at the small site of Chogha Bahnut, looking from the front toward the back.

the east part of the Burnt Building at Chogha Mish, but is smaller and without buttresses; its walls are only about 30-40 cms. thick (Figure 11). The two structures mirror clearly the difference between a small local settlement and an important center. The archaeological evidence shows that already in the late fifth millenium B.C. a distinctly stratified society existed.

After the apex of the prehistoric settlement in Middle Susiana 3 a sharp contraction occurred. In the following period about two-thirds of Chogha Mish was deserted; the Late Susiana deposits left by people living only in the northern part of the site created the present configuration of a northern high mound and a southern terrace (Figures 12, 13). The contraction at Chogha Mish was not a purely local phenomenon. In surveys directed by Henry Wright more settlements were dated to Middle Susiana 3 than to any other prehistoric period; in Late Susiana the number of communities declined. This evidence has been interpreted as indicating a marked depopulation in the Susiana plain. There must have been, however, some redistribution of populations. The foundation in the Late Susiana period

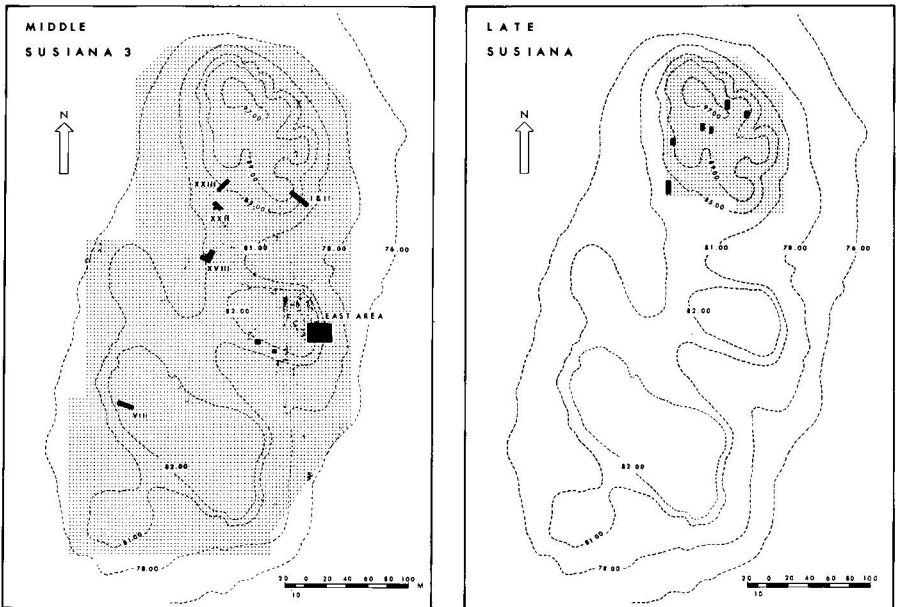


Figure 12: Sketch maps showing the extent of the Middle Susiana 3 and Late Susiana settlements at Chogha Mish.



Figure 13: Pottery vessels characteristic of various Susiana periods: A. Early Susiana painted ware; B. Archaic Susiana 2 Red-line ware; C. Archaic Susiana 1 Painted-burnished ware; D. Middle Susiana 1 painted ware; E. Archaic Susiana 3 Close-line ware; F. Archaic Susiana 3 Matt-painted ware.

of the new and large community at Susa must have brought struggles for political and economic power that ended in the aggrandizement of the new central site and the decline of older centers.

### The Earliest Phases of Occupation in the Susiana Plain

In the second season (1962) a small exploratory trench on one of the lowest parts of the Chogha Mish terrace produced sherds of wares previously unknown in central Khuzestan. Their elucidation became an important goal of later seasons. The evidence eventually obtained revealed a major new period, Archaic Susiana, characterized by unpainted straw-tempered ware. The stratified occurrence of the much rarer painted vessels also in use showed that Archaic Susiana must be subdivided into three phases, the latest with Matt-painted (Figure 13F) and Close-line (Figure 13E) wares. Below, Archaic Susiana 2 has Red-line (Figure 13B) and related wares, while Archaic Susiana 1 with Painted-burnished ware rested on virgin soil (Figure 13C). Fragmentarily-preserved Archaic Susiana rooms were built of unusual bricks, about a meter long and marked with finger imprints on one side.

The discovery of Archaic Susiana 1 on virgin soil at first inclined us to take it as representing the earliest habitation on the Susiana plain, but we soon realized that even that early cultural stage was too advanced

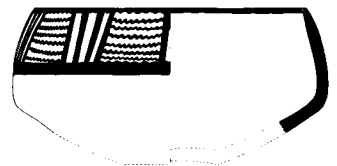
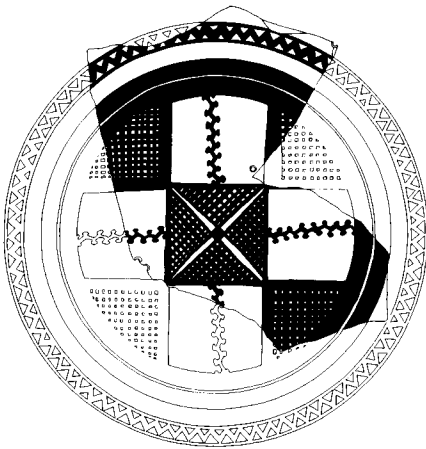


Figure 14: Primitive Painted-burnished ware from Chogha Bahnut assignable to a final phase of the formative Susiana period.

for a beginning. Moreover, we had also the problem as to the character and date of sherds found in one small area on virgin soil below prehistoric levels drastically disturbed by Protoliterate pits. Some of the sherds looked like simple variants of the Painted-burnished ware, but others were unfamiliar. Our rescue excavation at Chogha Bahnut provided the answer in the twelfth season (1978). Unlike Chogha Mish, Bahnut had not been continuously occupied. Its Middle Susiana 3 level stood directly on a level containing the same types of sherds that had puzzled us at Chogha Mish (Figure 14). Below, still earlier types of pottery proved that Bahnut was settled before Chogha Mish and established the existence of a period, Formative Susiana, preceding Archaic Susiana. The Susiana sequence is probably taken back to a pre-pottery phase by the deepest deposits of Bahnut, characterized by small flint cores, tiny fragments of stone vessels, and primitive clay figurines.

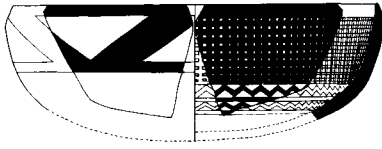


*Figure 15: Design on the interior of an Early Susiana bowl closely paralleled by pottery found in southern Mesopotamia at Eridu (Ubaid 1 period).*

### Connections with Mesopotamia

Throughout the historical period the Susiana plain and its capital, Susa, were intimately related with Mesopotamia, politically and culturally. Evidence from Chogha Mish shows that these relationships go back far into the prehistoric period. Archaic Susiana 3 is now closely linked with Mesopotamia by pottery recently discovered at Tell el-Oueilli in levels below those of the Ubaid I (Eridu) period and assigned to an initial "Ubaid 0" period. The excellent parallels between the Close-line ware of Archaic Susiana 3 and the el-Oueilli pottery of Ubaid 0 establish the contemporaneity of the two periods and a close connection between the Susiana plain and southern Mesopotamia. The connection continued in the following periods. Early Susiana and the Eridu stage of the Ubaid





*Figure 16: An Early Susiana bowl, reconstructed from a fragment, closely paralleled by pottery found in Southern Mesopotamia at Eridu (Ubaid 1 period).*

culture share important types of painted pottery (Figures 15, 16). In addition, links with the Samarra culture of northern Mesopotamia are provided by various features of Early Susiana painted pottery and by terracotta figurine heads. This three-way synchronism is pertinent to some much-discussed chronological problems in Mesopotamian prehistory.

In Middle Susiana 1 (ca. early 5th millennium B.C.) the close connections with Mesopotamia continued. Much of the painted pottery from Chogha Mish and sites of the Hajji Mohammed stage of the Ubaid culture is identical in shape and decoration (Figure 13D). A great change had occurred by the time of Middle Susiana 3 and the contemporary standard Ubaid culture. Although general affinities remain, as well as some special types held in common, the Susiana and Mesopotamian potters were following divergent paths. These and other cultural differences may well reflect the developing individuality of the Sumerians and Elamites still shrouded in prehistoric anonymity. Not until the Protoliterate period were the two areas again to share cultural elements, this time in a major historical development that must have brought Mesopotamians into the Susiana plain.

The excavations at Chogha Mish, supplemented by those at Chogha Bahnut, have provided a wealth of information for a long span of prehistoric and protohistoric development in a crucial part of the ancient world.