



## Chogha Mish

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During the preparation of the publication of the first five seasons of excavation at Chogha Mish (OIP 101) many finds have been analyzed in more detail than was possible earlier. Some of the resulting insights can be illustrated by clay sealings. The designs imprinted on them have been a major source of information on the complex sociological and artistic development of the dawning historical period in southern Mesopotamia and Khuzestan around 3400 B.C. Such impressions occur on either independent objects, the records in the form of tablets and clay balls containing tokens, or on lumps of clay attached to various elements. It is the imprints on the inner side of these clay lumps which, though far less dramatic than the seal impressions on their obverses, provide the clues to the various functions of the sealings.

In the second season of excavation (1963), when we began to explore the Protoliterate remains of the lower part of the mound, some of the many sealings found had on the inner side the smooth impression of a stick with string coiled around it; a few relatively large examples showed that all such fragments had originally been parts of conical clay sealings placed around a stick surrounded by string at one end (Fig. 1). Multiple rollings of a single cylinder seal, always running down the cone, cover the outside. Such sealings clearly constitute a standard type, one which had already been in use before the Protoliterate period; examples impressed by stamp seals were found in 1932 by the Oriental Institute excavations at the prehistoric site of Tali Bakun near Persepolis. Moreover, the geographical distribution of the type is wide; examples found in 1954 at the third millennium B.C. site of Lerna in the Greek Peloponnesus were interpreted as sealings around the pegs of wooden boxes. It remained for Enrica Fiandra, working with well-preserved examples of such sealings from the early second millennium B.C. palace site of Phaistos in southern Crete to establish their precise function as door sealings. The latch of a door and the peg or knob attached to the adjacent wall were tied together with string; clay was pressed against the wall and around the projecting peg, and then impressed with a stamp or cylinder seal, depending upon the geographic area and the period. Building on the clue provided by Phaistos, Fiandra has demonstrated the widespread

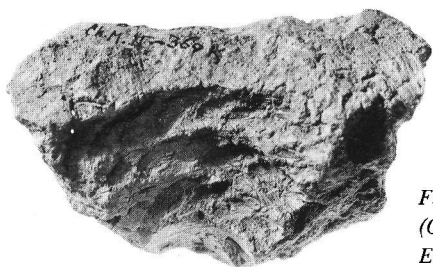


Figure 1. Interior view of a door sealing (Ch.M. II-360m). (Photograph by Mr. Edgar Peterson)

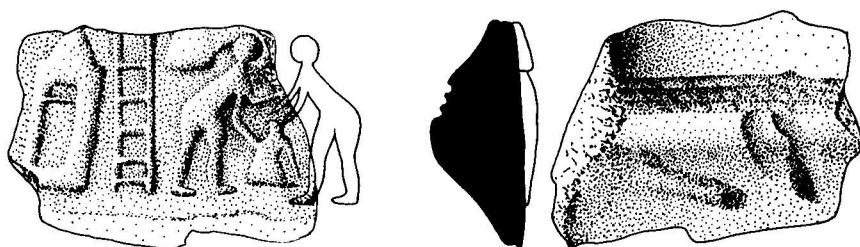


Figure 2. Three views of a jar-neck sealing (Ch.M. III-805); exterior with impressions showing a granary scene. (Drawing by Mr. Abbas Alizadeh)

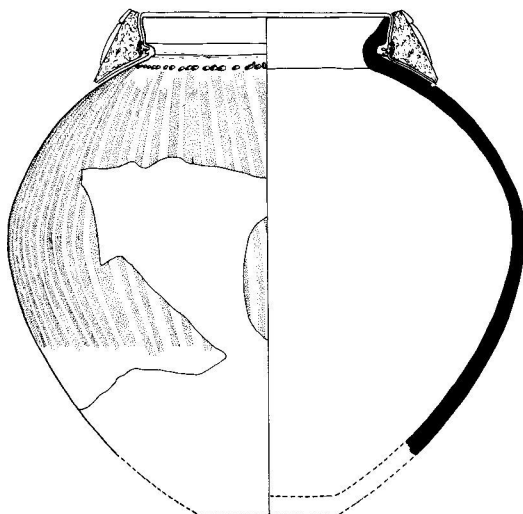


Figure 3. Jar-neck sealing Ch.M. III-805 matched with a fragmentary Protoliterate jar, Ch.M. 3.685. (Drawing by Mr. Abbas Alizadeh)

use of conical door sealings in western Asia and Egypt, as well as the light that they can shed on economic organization and procedures.

Since the function of the door sealings demanded their eventual breakage, usually only fragments, often very small, are retrieved. Highly unusual are several Chogha Mish fragments found in the second season; they join to form a complete door sealing preserving in the interior all the imprints normal to the type and, in addition, even that of the string running from the knot around the stick toward the door latch. The piece is atypical only in having an unimpressed exterior.

The door sealings form the largest identifiable category of the attached sealings from Chogha Mish. They are found in areas of ordinary private houses, thus indicating that a considerable number of persons owned cylinder seals and used them in their own houses. In other words, the door sealings suggest that cylinder seals were fairly widely distributed among the general population of a Protoliterate city. These sealings are also important for the evidence which they provide as to the types of seals in use at Chogha Mish itself. The designs on the door sealings vary considerably, some being rendered in the finest style of the Protoliterate period and others in a simplified, more geometric style. This proof that seals of the highest caliber were in use at the site heightens the probability that the tablets and clay balls with impressions in the fine style were also made at the site to record economic transactions within the boundaries of the territory controlled by Chogha Mish itself.

The preponderance of stick sealings indicates that it was more important to secure doors rather than individual containers. Though jars were frequently closed by clay caps, which offered a large field for rolling cylinder seals, only rare examples are so imprinted. Slightly more common are sealings the inner sides of which show string imprints and both flat and puckered areas. In a moment of inspiration, Guillermo Algaze realized that such fragments would fit over the string tied around the necks of jars to hold a cloth cover in place. To prove the point he found among the Chogha Mish pottery vessels in the Oriental Institute Museum a perfect match for the best preserved of the jar-neck sealings, as indicated by the drawings of Abbas Alizadeh (Figs. 2, 3). The contents of a jar so protected could not be disturbed without detection.

The door and jar-neck sealings are examples of the evidence to be presented in OIP 101, the preparation of which is drawing to a close with the devoted aid of the Chogha Mish team, Carolyn Z. Livingood, Abbas Alizadeh, and Guillermo Algaze.