

News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

Issued confidentially to members and friends

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NEWSLETTER FROM CHOGHA MISH, IRAN

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

January 26, 1978

Last season, the eleventh at Chogha Mish, was one in which no newsletter was sent to you even though we had exciting things to report. By now if the Oriental Institute's Annual Report has appeared, you will know that we had very good results from Chogha Mish itself where we dug in the Archaic and Protoliterate levels. Moreover, the partial destruction of a mound, Chogha Bonut-i-Moezi, three kilometers to the west of our village, precipitated an unexpected enlargement of our program. After I stopped the bulldozing of Bonut, I received permission from the Ministry of Culture and Arts for a trial excavation there. The results far exceeded my wildest expectations, namely the discovery of a new cultural stage earlier than any found at Chogha Mish. To complete the surprise, the lowest levels at Bonut apparently belong to a very early period before the invention of pottery. Thus, by the end of the last season, we had made major additions to the beginning of the long prehistoric sequence known from Chogha Mish. Extension of the work at Bonut stands as a major goal for our work this year.

The story of this season begins in October when I went to Iran to attend two international meetings. The first was the Rencontre de Suse, organized by Jean Perrot, the Director of the French Mission in Khuzestan, in celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the building of the Susa expedition house. Almost every archaeologist now active in Iran, about forty persons, attended the Rencontre, which lasted five days. I was met at Abadan, a four-hour drive from Ghaleh Khalil, in the middle of the night by our driver, Mohammed Basirifar, and spent two busy days here before the Rencontre preparing an informal exhibition of our long ceramic sequence from Chogha Mish complemented by that from Bonut.

The results of French work in the Susa area in recent years were presented in lectures given by the archaeologists responsible for the individual sectors, and by visits to the sites and to the store-rooms where the finds were laid out. Since Susa itself was not founded until the final stage of the prehistoric sequence (Late Susiana), parallels for the long sequence which we have uncovered at one site, Chogha Mish, must be sought in their area at various small sites.

One afternoon, after visits to the sites of Jararabad, Djowi, and Bendebal, Genevieve Dollfus guided the gib Rencontre bus over the new canal roads to Chogha Mish. Immediately after the morning session at Susa, I had rushed to Ghaleh Khalil to put the last touches to our "exhibition," and had afterwards gone on to Chogha Mish to wait for the bus. After a relatively brief tour of the site, we came to the house to see our pottery sequence. It completely filled all the niches and flat surfaces in the living and dining rooms. For the first time, I had had an opportunity to lay out a good selection of our Achaemenid pottery (ca. 5th century B.C.). Figure 1 shows the first millennium experts crowded around the table, all of them surprised to see such a rich and interesting range of material. Chogha Mish is better known among my colleagues for its earlier remains. I am happy to say that our informal exhibition was impressive. For example, the early sequence, beginning with the aceramic flints



Figure 1.

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and the Formative Susiana pottery from Bonut and continuing with the strikingly distinctive painted wares of Archaic Susiana from Chogha Mish, caused quite a sensation.

After the Susa Rencontre, the annual symposium on archaeological research in Iran was held in Tehran. I arrived just in time, despite a train many hours late, to reach the Archaeological Museum for the opening of the special exhibition by Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress Farah. As in the past, she made a tour of the cases, asking questions about each. During the following week over seventy papers, crammed with details of last year's surveys and excavations, were delivered in English, French, and Persian. After I returned to Chicago, there remained only six weeks in which to catch up with teaching and to prepare for the season proper.



Figure 2.

I arrived in Tehran with one companion, Mr. Guillermo Algaze (University of Chicago), on Christmas Day. At the British Institute of Persian Studies we were warmly received by the Stronachs and found ourselves included in their Christmas lunch only a few hours after our arrival. Another member of the Expedition, Mr. James Simson (Sheffield University), who had been working with a British excavation at Old Kandahar in Afghanistan, joined us in Tehran. After some days in Tehran during which I completed various administrative arrangements for the season and the two young men visited the Archaeological Museum, the three of us took the overnight train to Andimeshk, about an hour's drive from our village. It was a joy to exchange the huge booming city of Tehran for the comfort and relative quiet of our own mud-brick expedition house. We immediately began to get settled (The unpacking and arranging of the Expedition's small field library in its alcove always brings the house to life.) and to work on the objects already here. A few days after our arrival, Mohammed went to the Ahwaz airport, a drive of about two and a half hours, to meet a third staff member, Miss Diana Olson (Art Institute of Chicago), our photographer. Our group was completed on January 9 by the arrival of Miss Man-

soureh Niamir (University of Toronto) and Miss Fatimeh Pajuhandeh, who likes to be called Suri. She is the only staff member who has been here



Figure 3.

before. Last season she came as an archaeological assistant; this year she is the official representative of the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research, which is the section of the Ministry of Culture and Arts responsible for archaeological excavations and surveys.

We have been pushing ahead with both practical and archaeological tasks. For example, an immense household improvement has been made. Since the expedition house was built, its running water has been provided by back-breaking manual labor—pumping and carrying heavy water tins from the well in our front courtyard around the length of the house and up steep steps to a water tank on the roof. At the end of last season, the ICAR generously presented the Expedition with a pump powered by kerosene and gasoline. After our return this year, in one long day a master pipe fitter from Dezful, helped by some of our men, installed a new water system. The well was deepened, the pump mounted in a store room, holes knocked through the mud brick wall of the house for new pipes, and a second water tank placed on the



Figure 4.

roof. Now the pump fills the two roof tanks and waters the small courtyard garden in about ten minutes. The luxury of a plentiful water supply can only be appreciated if one has lived for years without it.

The organization of the storage of objects found in previous seasons is a perennial task and goes hand-in-hand with their recording and analysis. Everyone has been attacking the backlog of this work with efficient vigor. Diana's candid Polaroid shots will give an idea more vivid than any description. She caught Guillermo working on storage in the garage (figure 2), and a "sherd listing" contingent in full operation in the courtyard (figure 3). Jamie, on the left, has concentrated on sherds from Chogha Mish and also on drawing pottery. Suri, in the middle, has been catching up with the numbering and detailed description of important sherds found at Bonut last season. Mansoureh, on the right, besides drawing pottery, is analyzing sherds from the surface of Jundi Shapur, the huge Sassanian and Early Islamic city not far from Chogha Mish. They will serve as a basis for comparison and dating of the late period sherds found in our trial trench at Boheh Fazili near Chogha Mish a number of seasons ago. Diana has been making a tremendous dent in the photographic backlog. She has already shot more than 900 black and white negatives and has improvised a darkroom for developing them at the wash-basin end of one of the passageways. Once, when it was too cold for such activities, she repainted the shabby courtyard gates with a splendid rendering of a typical Middle Susiana design (figure 4).

Archaeological fieldwork sometimes demands new construction as well as the unraveling of ancient ones. Thus we returned to find the bridge, built last year to shorten the one-way trip to Bonut from 18 km to 3 km, destroyed. The heavy work of rebuilding it was skillfully executed by members of the Iranian staff. Nabi Shahkurian, our guard and cook, obtained heavy logs and branches from orchards in his village near here. A truck driver who will be using the bridge came to help us and brought a load of branches (figure 5). Nabi is standing at the left and one of our



Figure 5.

most talented workers, Jehan Shah Ahmedi, who planned the bridge, is on the right. After deepening the bed of the quickly-flowing stream, three cement pipes were maneuvered into place. The tree trunks were then laid down so as to form primitive arches (figure 6). Branches covered by sod completed the bridge. Then two truckloads of gravel were brought in to fill the muddy approaches to it. Now we are able to get to Bonut with ease, so I am hoping to begin excavation there the day after tomorrow. We have all, I think, felt satisfaction in making a dent in the backlog of work in the house. Many important sherds, which had for lack of time not received their due, have been rediscovered. Nonetheless, we are all looking forward to being out on a mound and I hope that there will be interesting things to describe in a later report.



Figure 6.

There is no time to tell you very much about the little details of our daily life, which consists for the most part of work! However, the new staff members find the experience of living in the village and becoming acquainted with our neighbors and their way of life to be very exciting. Suri was welcomed back enthusiastically by all her friends in the village. Late one afternoon Jamie organized a football game with some young boys, but now that the experienced players have found out about his skill, they would like to carry him off for matches in other villages. Our weather has been bright and sunny so that the second-hand news that we heard about the state of emergency caused by blizzards in the States seems unreal. We fear that conditions must be extremely difficult and hope that they will soon improve.

This brings to all of you the very best wishes for the New Year.

Helene J. Kantor

The Oriental Institute cordially invites you to attend a lecture:

THE SHRINE THAT NEVER WAS: AN EGYPTOLOGICAL MYSTERY

by T. G. H. James
the British Museum

Tuesday, April 11

8:00 P.M.

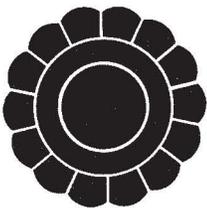
Breasted Hall
1155 E. 58th Street

(The Quadrangle Club, 1155 East 57th Street, will be open to Oriental Institute members who wish to make dinner reservations. Please call Mrs. Schlender, 493-8601. Please remember that the privilege of the use of the dining room at the Quadrangle Club is a courtesy extended to members of the Oriental Institute only on nights when there is an Oriental Institute lecture.)

UPCOMING ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MEMBERSHIP LECTURE:

May 22

"Mummies and Magic: An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian
Funerary Beliefs and Practices"
Lanny D. Bell, Director, Chicago House



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