



ČOĠĀ MĪŠ

ČOĠĀ MĪŠ (Chogha Mish), the largest prehistoric and protohistoric site (ca. 17 ha) in the area below the Zagros foothills between Dezfūl and Šūštar. It was excavated by the Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago for eleven seasons between 1340 Š./1961 and 1367 Š./1978, under the direction of [P. P. Delougaz](#) (d. 1975) and Helene J. Kantor; in the fourth through the tenth seasons the University of California at Los Angeles was cosponsor of the excavation. Čoġā Mīš was occupied continuously, except for one or two presumably short breaks, from approximately the late 6th millennium to the late 4th millennium b.c.e. and must have played a key role in the cultural and social development of the region.

The prehistoric sequence. An early stage of the cultural sequence of the Susiana plain, the Archaic Susiana period (late 6th millennium b.c.e.), can be subdivided into three phases, defined by the decorated pottery. The earliest, Archaic Susiana 1, characterized by Painted-Burnished ware (Figure 1.a; Kantor, 1976, fig. 28), is so far known primarily at Čoġā Mīš. It was followed by Archaic Susiana 2, defined by Red-Line ware (Figure 1.b; Kantor, 1976, fig. 27), and Archaic Susiana 3, defined by Matt-Painted (Figure 1.c) and Close-Line (Figure 1.d) wares (Kantor, 1976, figs. 26, 25). Occupation of the site had begun even earlier, however: A very small area provided pottery transitional between the Formative Susiana period and Archaic Susiana 1. The Formative period was well represented at Čoġā Banūt-e Mo'ezzī (Chogha Banut- i Moezi) 6 km to the west (excavated by the Čoġā Mīš expedition in 1356 Š./1977 and 1357 Š./1978; Kantor, 1978; idem, 1972, pl. VI/b-g; cf. Hole, p. 76 figs. 5, 8, for the



same period at Tepe Tūlāī). At Čogā Mīš the quite sophisticated level of culture characteristic of the Archaic Susiana period is attested, for example, by walls built of mud bricks, each measuring ca. 1 m in length (Delougaz, 1976, figs. 15-19), by the intricate designs on pottery, and by a variety of female figurines.

Stratified structures and debris of the succeeding Early (ca. 6000 b.c.e.; Delougaz, 1976, figs. 9-12), Middle (5th millennium; figs. 3-7, 9), and Late (early 4th millennium) Susiana periods have provided abundant evidence for the continuity and increasing complexity of the prehistoric Susiana culture. Already in the Archaic Susiana period the settlement had had a mixed economy of animal husbandry and agriculture. By the Early Susiana period stone hoes, attached to sticks by means of bitumen and cord, had become common (Kantor, 1976, fig. 21). Fragments of two large vessels, one of pottery and one of stone imitating a ceramic shape, along with well-cut stone amulets, suggest some degree of specialization in the potters' and stonecutters' crafts. Pottery shapes and decoration (Figure 2.a) developed from Archaic Susiana 3 prototypes.

The Middle Susiana period probably spanned much of the 5th millennium b.c.e. and can be divided into two major phases, Middle Susiana 1 and 3, represented by stratified building remains and separated by a still little-understood transitional phase, Middle Susiana 2. Middle Susiana 1 pottery includes some lingering Early Susiana shapes, as well as evolved versions of them, and many new types (Figure 2.b). In Middle Susiana 3, in contrast to earlier periods, such representational motifs as bulls or bucrania, leopards, large-horned goats (Plate I), and snakes are prominent (Kantor, 1976, figs. 1-8). Some are direct ancestors of designs of the Late Susiana period.

Excavation areas widely distributed over Čogā Mīš document the growth of the settlement throughout the prehistoric period. In Archaic Susiana 1 and 2 only a limited area on the southeastern side of the present mound was occupied. In Archaic Susiana 3 the settlement was somewhat larger, and its size increased appreciably in the Early Susiana period. In Middle Susiana 3, and perhaps already in Middle Susiana 1, the entire mound was occupied, constituting the largest settlement of its age so far excavated in the region. The documentation of such a large aggregation of population in the 5th millennium b.c.e. is one of the significant contributions of the Čogā Mīš excavations to knowledge of the development of prehistoric society on the Susiana plain. One Middle Susiana 3 building was shown by its thick foundation of pure clay, massive walls, and regular exterior niching to have



had a specialized character; it had been destroyed by fire. The contrast between Čoġā Mīš, with this monumental Burnt Building, and Čoġā Banūt, with its modest house, is that between the leading settlement in the region and a satellite village. By Middle Susiana 3 socially stratified communities already existed on the Susiana plain. In the Late Susiana period the settlement at Čoġā Mīš shrank markedly. Only the northernmost part of the mound was occupied. There some 7 m of debris accumulated, forming the high part of the mound that became the citadel of later periods. This striking reduction in area and population corresponds to a general decline in settlement size on the Susiana plain, as revealed by surface surveys (Wright and Johnson, 1975, table III). At least some of the changes in the Late Susiana period, and in particular the decline of Čoġā Mīš, must have been linked to the foundation of a new urban center at Susa.

Correlations with prehistoric Mesopotamia. Čoġā Mīš provides important evidence for early connections between Susiana and Mesopotamia. The Close-Line ware of Archaic Susiana 3 is paralleled by pottery of a cultural phase, Ubaid ('Obayd) O, antedating the long-known Ubaid sequence of southern Mesopotamia (Calvet). It is also related to but demonstrably earlier than the painted pottery typical of the Samarra (Sāmarrā) period in central Mesopotamia (contemporary with the Ubaid 1 = Eridu period in the south). Early Susiana is linked to the Samarra period by various ceramic elements and terracotta human heads (Plate II; Calvet, figs. 23, 24). In addition, Čoġā Mīš shares with Ubaid 1 a specific class of painted bowls (Kantor, 1976, figs. 19, 20). The stratified finds at Čoġā Mīš thus establish the contemporaneity of Early Susiana with the Ubaid 1 period of southern Mesopotamia and the Samarra period of central Mesopotamia and also strengthen the synchronism between the two Mesopotamian periods.

In Middle Susiana 1 much of the decorated pottery at Čoġā Mīš is paralleled exactly by that of Ubaid 2 (= Hajji Muhammad [Ḥājī Moḥammad]) of southern Mesopotamia. In contrast, Middle Susiana 3 and the contemporary Ubaid 3 of Mesopotamia no longer have such a wide range of ceramic connections, though there are close similarities in particular instances.

The Protoliterate period. In the dawning historical period, around 3400 b.c.e., Čoġā Mīš was again the main site on the eastern Susiana plain; the entire mound was occupied. The long-lived Susiana culture was replaced, however, by a new culture, with pottery and other finds indistinguishable from those in southern Mesopotamia and in Protoliterate colonies far to the west along the



Euphrates and other rivers (Algaze). At Čogā Mīš numerous terracotta cones, exactly like those used in the mosaic decoration of temples in Mesopotamia (Brandes), and a massive platform testify to the presence of monumental buildings. An area of private houses and pits was also exposed. Particularly noteworthy among the finds are clay balls enclosing tokens, small pellets of clay formed into spheres, pyramids, and other geometric or naturalistic forms as devices for keeping accounts (Delougaz, 1972, pl. IX); tablets with numerals and seal impressions; and door sealings. Among the cylinder-seal motifs so far unique to Čogā Mīš (Delougaz, 1972, pl. X) are images of the surrender of a fortified city (Figure 3), a city ruler enthroned in a boat with two prisoners (Figure 4), and a banquet with musicians and a singer (Figure 5; for a photograph of one detail, see [čang](#), Figure 55). A pair of mythological boats with prows in the form of human beings drinking from a jar with straws is the first occurrence of two prominent motifs of Mesopotamian art, the divine boat of the sun god and banqueters drinking through straws (Kantor, 1984). A four-lugged jar incised with representational designs adds a new category to Protoliterate art. After the early part of the Protoliterate period Čogā Mīš was deserted for almost a millennium.

Later occupation. In the Old Elamite (Sukkalmahhu) period early in the 2nd millennium b.c.e. the high part of the mound at Čogā Mīš was occupied by an Elamite fort with massive walls. It commanded a wide view over the plains and must have controlled the strategic route skirting the foothills of the mountains between the Dez and Kārūn rivers. Typical pottery, sealings, and a bituminous stone vessel with a spout in the form of a well-modeled rearing goat (Kantor, 1977) were found.

After the Sukkalmahhu period Čogā Mīš was again deserted until the 1st millennium b.c.e., when the lower mound was occupied by an Achaemenid settlement. The sherds provide a large corpus of pottery with excellent parallels at Iron Age sites in the highlands of Persia (see [ceramics x](#)), and an intact Achaemenid burial contained several pottery vessels, two bronze vessels, and some weapons. Although house walls had been almost completely destroyed by erosion and plowing, one important structure was recovered. It was an underground circular granary with an interior diameter of 7.5 m and thick walls of coarse mud brick extending down more than 2 m into the Protoliterate deposits below the Achaemenid level; it has no parallel in Persia but excellent ones dated to the Achaemenid period in southern Palestine. The fact that it was spacious enough to store a supply of grain far larger than



needed by one family suggests that Čoĝā Miš was again a strategic center, not just a simple village.

The Achaemenid village was the last significant settlement at Čoĝā Miš. Late Parthian sherds scattered over various parts of the site, as well as “torpedo jar” burials and a kiln on the northwestern part of the low mound, represent only the outskirts of a huge urban conglomeration stretching west from Čoĝā Miš for about a kilometer. By then all memory of the city that had dominated the strategic east-west route skirting the Zagros foothills in the prehistoric and Early Protoliterate periods had been lost.

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Figure 1. Typical pottery of the Archaic Susiana period. a. Bowl in Painted-Burnished ware, Archaic Susiana 1; diameter 16.5 cm. b. Bowl in Red-Line ware, Archaic Susiana 2; diameter 14.0 cm. c. Bowl in Matt-Painted Ware, Archaic Susiana 3; diameter 15.0 cm. d. Bowl in Close-Line ware, Archaic Susiana 3; diameter 6.0 cm.

Figure 2. a. Typical pottery of the Early Susiana period; diameter 12.0 cm. b. Typical pottery of the Middle Susiana period; diameter 21.0 cm.

Plate I. Sherd of a Middle Susiana 3 krater, with goats; height 6.3 cm, width 6.0 cm.



Plate II. Head of an Early Susiana figurine, in sandy buff ware with red wash; height 4.7 cm, width 4.3 cm, thickness 2.3 cm.

Figure 3. Drawing of cylinder-seal design with the siege of a city, Protoliterate period; 4.0 x 8.4 cm.

Figure 4. Drawing of cylinder-seal design with victorious city ruler seated in a boat with retinue and prisoners, Protoliterate period; diam. 4.2 x 6.9 cm.

Figure 5. Drawing of cylinder-seal design with feasting man, a servant and musicians, Protoliterate period; diam. 6.7 x 2.9 cm.