



## ČOĠĀ ZANBĪL

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**ČOĠĀ ZANBĪL** (Chogha Zanbil), ancient Āl Untaš<sup>d</sup> Napiriša (Elamite) or Dūr Untaš (Assyrian), a city founded by the Elamite king Untaš Napiriša (formerly transcribed Untaš<sup>d</sup> Gal; r. ca. 1275-40 B.C.E.; Hinz and Koch, pp. 116-17) about 40 km southeast of Susa at a strategic point on a main road leading to the highlands. The city, which was centered around a ziggurat, stood on a previously unsettled plateau above the banks of the Dez (Hithite) river. Construction was begun early in the reign of Untaš Napiriša, but the intended dynastic center was never finished (Ghirshman, 1966, pp. 7-10; 1968, *avant-propos*). After his death it remained a place of religious pilgrimage and a burial ground until about 1000 B.C.E. A sounding in the Išnikarab temple courtyard ([Figure 6](#) and [Figure 7](#)) demonstrated that the ziggurat and its dependencies were abandoned at about that time, not in 646 B.C.E., when the Assyrians recorded the destruction of the city (Carter and Stolper, p. 164).

A fortified city wall, more than 4 km long, encloses an area of about 100 ha. Inside it are two major sectors: the ziggurat with its dependencies (*siyan-kuk*) near the center and the “royal quarter” adjacent to a major city gate some 240 m east of the ziggurat enclosure. It appears that the rest of the land inside the city wall was never settled intensively.

The ziggurat was set off from the surrounding town by two successive enclosure walls (dimensions of the outer wall 1,200 x 800 m), both articulated by niches and buttresses. In the outer courtyard, to the right of the “royal entrance,” there was an impressive group of four temples, dedicated respectively to the goddess Pinikir, two divine couples—one IM [IŠKUR = Adad]



and Šala, the other Simut and dNIN.a-li (a title of the goddess Manzat)—and a group of eight gods, <sup>a</sup>*na-ap.ra-te-ip* (Naprateg), each honored by one of eight altars divided among four small shrines (Hinz and Koch, pp. 206, 788, 1126, 1084, 1002, 973). Votive figurines of women and animals and fragments of an inscribed faience bull half life size, from the temple of IM and Šala, offer some clues to Elamite religious customs. Another temple, located 180 m west of these four and dedicated to the Elamite divinities Hišmitik and Ruhuratir (Hinz and Koch, pp. 664, 1045), contains a separate wing with a bathroom, where purification ceremonies of some kind may have occurred (Ghirshman, 1968, pp. 9-41, figs. 2-3).

Within the inner enclosure wall the ziggurat (105.2 m<sup>2</sup>), its corners oriented toward the cardinal points, is preserved to a height of more than 25 m above the surrounding pavement. It consists of a mud-brick core faced with a skin of baked bricks 2 m thick. Every eleventh row of baked bricks is inscribed with a dedication of the ziggurat by Untaš Napiriša to the “lord of Susa,” Inšušinak (Ghirshman, 1966, p. 13; Steve, 1967, p. 7 n. 2).

According to the excavator, construction of the ziggurat began with a square open courtyard, which was paved with baked bricks and surrounded on all four sides by long, relatively narrow rooms. Four of these rooms constituted a temple dedicated to Inšušinak (temple A), entered through the interior of the original courtyard on its southeast side. In a second major building phase the original court was filled with a series of mud-brick terraces, each of smaller dimensions than the one below (Ghirshman, 1966, pp. 39-45, pl. XXXVII). The rooms opening from the original courtyard were blocked off; some continued in use as storerooms, entered by staircases leading from the top of the first terrace down to the original floor level. Grain, wood, pottery, huge numbers of architectural ornaments (e.g., glazed tiles and knobs), door leaves, lumps of color, and shells were among the provisions stored in these rooms (Ghirshman, 1966, p. 18). North of the first Inšušinak temple, a second temple, Inšušinak B, entered through the exterior facade of the courtyard, consisted of reused rooms of the original courtyard building (Ghirshman, 1966, pp. 34-36).

The ziggurat has been reconstructed as a four-level temple tower, with the actual temple (*kukunnum*) on the summit constituting a fifth level. Four doors were set in the middle of the ziggurat’s four faces, but only the southwestern door gave access to the stairs leading to the top stage. The simple two-phase construction sequence proposed by Roman Ghirshman in his original report is likely to have been more complex, for the interior walls of the original



courtyard building are not symmetrical (Heinrich, p. 240). Furthermore, inscribed bricks found on the site seem to indicate the presence of an even earlier ziggurat construction in approximately the same area of the site (Roche, pp. 191-97).

According to inscribed bricks found in the fabric of the ziggurat, it was dedicated to Inšušinak, lord of Susa. The *kukunnum* is known only from inscribed bricks found out of context. They suggest that this temple was dedicated at some times to Inšušinak and at others to both Inšušinak and Napiriša, presumably the chief deity of the Elamite highlands (Roche, pp. 192-95). At the foot of the ziggurat and either incorporated into the northwestern section of the inner enclosure wall or just outside it were temples dedicated to the highest-ranking Elamite divinities of the time: Napiriša; Išnikarab, the close associate of Inšušinak; and Kiririša, the consort of Napiriša. The addition of Napiriša's name to the *kukunnum* inscriptions and the construction of the Kiririša temple at the foot of the ziggurat some time after the original founding of the city may well reflect a conscious change in policy designed to give a more prominent position to the highland deities and thus to strengthen political links with the areas east of Susiana (Miroschedji, 1980, pp. 142-43; idem, 1981, pp. 14-15; Vallat).

A shrine dedicated to Kiririša on the east side of the Kiririša-Išnikarab temple complex yielded large numbers of votive stone mace-heads and bronze weapons (Ghirshman, 1966, pp. 100-01). A niche and three chapels built into the southwestern side of the inner enclosure wall contained most of the cylinder seals excavated on the site. These seals were also votive objects and were found in association with numerous small animal figurines that must have served a similar purpose (Porada, 1970). The most popular material for the seals was faience and the most common image a "banquet." In addition, particularly in the 13th century B.C.E., glass seals carved with images imitating or expanding on contemporary Kassite glyptic styles were included in these caches (Porada, 1970, pp. 127-31). Walkways, offering tables, and podia of baked and glazed brick bear witness to the elaborate processions and sacrifices that must have taken place in the temenos. The provisions made for securing the doors (Fiandra, 1982) indicate that many valuable objects were once stored in the ziggurat's lower rooms. Faience statues of winged griffins and bulls guarded the entrances to the ziggurat, and monumental stelae stood in the courtyard (Ghirshman, 1966, pl. LXIX, pp. 66-67).

A little more than 200 m northeast of the outer enclosure wall of the ziggurat



was the “royal quarter” (Ghirshman, 1968, p. 49, fig. 17), accessible through a massive gate structure in the eastern city wall. It consisted of three large buildings with multiple courtyards, called “palaces” by the excavator. There was probably a fourth large building, but it has been completely eroded away. This area of the city probably served as the residence for the royal entourage.

Palaces II and III of the royal quarter were poorly preserved, and finds from them were sparse. Like the ziggurat, however, they were planned and executed on a monumental scale and date from the time of Untaš Napiriša. Palace I, the hypogeum palace, with its five vaulted underground burial chambers, remained in use until about 1000 B.C.E., possibly as a place of pilgrimage (Ghirshman, 1968, pp. 51-53, 59-74; Carter and Stolper, p. 162). Unlike Susa or Kabnak (Haft Tepe), where tombs were used for multiple burials, the underground vaults at Āl Untaš Napiriša contained only one skeleton; the rest of the bodies had been cremated. Why cremation has been attested only in the tombs of Āl Untaš Napiriša is unknown (Ghirshman, 1968, pp. 73-74). Approximately 180 m south of the royal quarter is a T-shaped sanctuary dedicated to the god Nusku.

The ziggurat and many of the buildings at Čoġā Zانبīl were well built and lavishly decorated. Baked brick, gypsum plaster, vaulting, and architectural ornament of faience and glass were extensively used (Amiet, 1966, p. 354, figs. 261-62). Further stockpiles of baked brick, bitumen, and plaster were discovered just inside the temenos wall, and huge numbers of faience knobs and tiles were stored in the rooms on the lowest stage of the ziggurat. The production of these materials and objects occurred on or near the site (Ghirshman, 1966, p. 11). Votive objects were also made and stored in the temple workshops (Ghirshman, 1966, pp. 94-99; idem, 1968, p. 43).

Āl Untaš Napiriša was designed both as a capital city and as a kind of federal sanctuary, in which the principal gods of the Elamite realm were honored. Its construction represented a radical departure from tradition and must have been intended to challenge the long-established position of Susa as the regional center. Middle Elamite rulers also built other temple cities throughout their empire, but none appears to have been either as spectacular or as short-lived as Āl Untaš Napirisa (Ghirshman, 1968, pp. 1-8, 38; Carter, 1971, pp. 188-89; Miroschedji, 1980, pp. 142-43; Vallat, 1980; Carter and Stolper, pp. 37-39, 162; Schacht, pp. 184-85).



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Figure 6. Topographic plan of Čoġā Zanbīl. After Ghirshman, 1996, plan I.

Figure 7. Čoġā Zanbīl, plan of the ziggurat with its dependencies. After Ghirshman, 1968, plan I.